# Esquire

December 2015 | £4.25

Style & Substance

Hic

AA Gill's drinking years

**Squelch** 

Giles Coren in the country

Roar

Tim Lewis on man-eaters

**Thud** 

Sanjiv Bhattacharya tackles a sport in crisis



An audience with...

Noel Gallagher

"Fame was not wasted on me"

Interview by ALEX BILMES
Photographs by SIMON EMMETT



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#### **COVERS**





#### **Noel Gallagher**

Photograph Simon Emmett
Noel Gallagher wears Newsstand edition:
black wool jacket; white cotton shirt, both by
Dior Homme Subscriber edition: Noel Gallagher
photographed in Times Square, New York City,
by Paul Slattery, 1994

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#### **AA Gill**

The notorious *Sunday Times* critic and reporter is also *Esquire*'s Uncle Dysfunctional, although not this month; the filthy swine is "away" again. Happily, in his absence, we have an exclusive extract from *Pour Me*, his brilliant new memoir of his drinking days. "People don't come up and talk to me about food and television, or African politics," he says. "No. But they will come up and ask me about *Esquire*."

#### **Giles Coren**

"You know that terrible wanker who lives in a house, a very big house in the country, but his life is still shit?" asks the *Esquire* editor-at-large. "That's me, that is." The first installment of his alternative rural saga — which will run over three issues — begins on page 172. When he's not mucking out his stables, Coren remains a critic and columnist for *The Times*. His book, *How To Eat Out*, is available now.

#### **Tim Lewis**

"Going to Bangladesh looking for man-eating tigers has some key hallmarks of a midlife crisis," admits the award-winning Esquire contributing editor of his intrepid adventure for this issue. "Thankfully, the experience was a little more interesting and much less expensive than buying a sports car." A features writer at The Observer, his book, Land of Second Chances, is out now.

Slim d'Hermès watch in steel, Manufacture H1950 ultra-thin movement. SLIM D'HERMÈS, PURITY IN MOTION.

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#### **NOEL GALLAGHER**

Britain's most outspoken rock star opens up on fame, the angry Oasis split, today's pop stars, going solo and being the last of his kind

#### THE MISSING NOVELIST

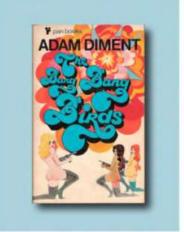
Why did lauded Sixties thriller writer Adam Diment turn his back on wealth and fame?

#### MY COUNTRYSIDE HELL

Lifelong Londoner Giles Coren buys in the country — bad move

#### **BRAIN DAMAGE**

Injuries in American football are threatening to kill the game. Sanjiv Bhattacharya reports







#### **CONTRIBUTORS**

#### Sanjiv Bhattacharya

"You don't need to be a fan to find American football fascinating right now," says our US correspondent, a Brit-turned-Yank who ought to know. "The greed, the violence, the corruption, the secrecy. It's the perfect sport for an empire in decline. But even as the bodies pile up, the sport keeps growing. Go figure!" Bhattacharya's book, Secrets and Wives: the Hidden World of Mormon Polygamy, is out now.

#### **Blair Getz Mezibov**

For this month's fashion pages, photographer Mezibov shot "cool and effortless" Spectre star Ben Whishaw in winter's finest coats in "a warehouse deep in East London." The location might have been grungy, but as Mezibov points out, "the wardrobe was rather luxurious." Based in New York and London, his work has appeared in The New York Times and Harper's Bazaar, among many other publications.

#### **Simon Emmett**

An Esquire regular, the multi-talented Emmett has photographed numerous cover stars for the magazine in recent years, including Idris Elba, Joaquin Phoenix, Lily Allen, José Mourinho, Alex Turner, Robert Pattinson, Michael Caine, Rosie Huntington-Whiteley and Mark Ronson. This month, he adds the name of Noel Gallagher to that list. Emmett has also shot for Vanity Fair, Rolling Stone and The New York Times.



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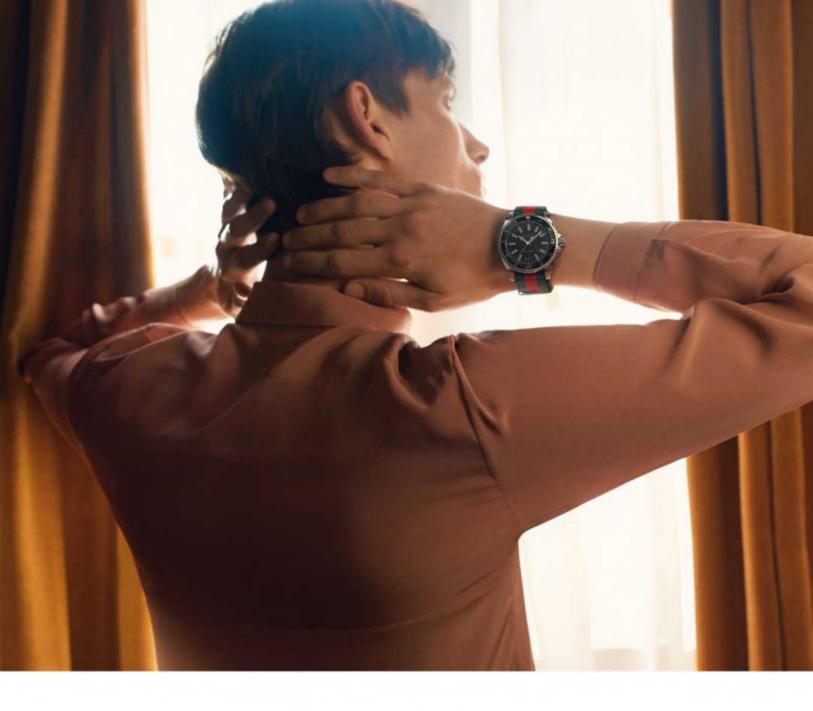
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# EDITOR'S LETTER

**EVERYONE HAS, OR HAD, A DAD.** Even if you never met him, or lost him early, or you are the lovechild of Germaine Greer and Gloria Steinem, conceived in a test tube and shuttled as a child between the features desk of *Ms* magazine and a women-only commune in the woods, still you were fathered by someone. (Norman Mailer, probably.) Science has not, yet, come up with a way of creating humans that doesn't require, at some point, a man — even if the sum total of his contribution to the process is to wank into a cup; hey, don't knock it till you've tried it.

Most of us weren't conceived that way. We know or knew, or at least met, our dads — and so did our mums. Relationships with fathers can be complicated, of course, perhaps especially for sons. Still, for the majority of us a dad is a useful thing to have, or have had.

Some of us are dads ourselves, as well as sons. Those men who are not dads yet will, if they're lucky, go on to become one. It's the most significant, fulfilling and consuming thing most of us will likely do, even more than being a son, a brother, a lover or a friend.

So what's so funny about dads? And why has the word become shorthand for something naff, clueless and embarrassing?

2015 has been a year of dad-bashing. We've had dad bods (still not entirely clear exactly what this is but since I am a dad and I have a bod, of sorts, I presume I only have to take my dad shirt off to find out; stay tuned for that); plus dad dancing; dad cars; dad jeans; and most recently, the dad sandal. Introducing this fugly footwear

last summer, *The Guardian* could hardly stifle a girlish giggle. The dad sandal, we were told, is Velcro-strapped, waterproof, practical and on sale for the "dad-friendly price of £25".

Dads, eh? What a bunch of cheap losers!

Of course, this dad-bashing business is just affectionate ribbing. We shouldn't get uptight about it. But actually, we all know what putting the word "dad" in front of something means. It is sniggering, it is belittling, it is pejorative.

More than that, it is revealing. The truth is that dads are not over-the-hill sad-sacks, struggling for breath through a cloud of pipe smoke, and devoid of sex appeal. I know lots of dads and not one of them would be caught half-dead wearing Velcro sandals, either in earnest or with the smugness of the ironically fashionable. The dads I know, including my own, are not at all naff, or clueless or embarrassing. (Yes, yes, I'm the exception that proves the rule.)



Dad rocker: this month's cover star is Noel Gallagher, father of three

For a time, a decade and more ago, our cover star, Noel Gallagher, alongside Paul Weller and other hopeless underachievers of that sorry stripe, was charged with having helped invent something called "dad rock": guitar music made by and for people who had made the mistake of siring progeny, the selfish bastards. Noel is a father of three — a daughter from his first marriage and two boys from his second — and in his *Esquire* interview he talks briefly about his own father and at length about his kids. Like, yawn.

Noel is not the only recidivist seed-spreader to have besmirched our cover this year. We've also had Paul McCartney, Daniel Craig and Sean Penn. I know, right? What a bunch of no-account dweebs.

And that, I suppose, is the problem. Philip Larkin's "old-style fools in hats and coats" have gone the way of cardigans and landlines. We don't wear hats. We are not old-style. Everything rebellious kids do, dads these days have done first, and better, and in many cases still do. All that adolescent stuff — sex and drugs and rock'n'roll — is no longer the preserve of the young. This creates the resentment and the need to assert primacy by sneering.

It's when we are in our teens that we are most mortified by our dads. That's because it's then that we are most unsure of ourselves, most awkward in our skins and most concerned with what the world thinks of us. With good reason, because the world thinks we are spotty, smelly, boring, self-righteous, compulsive masturbators (and not into cups), and the world, for once, is right.

So, here's to the dads. The dads who have perfectly acceptable bods, ta very much, and who couldn't give a pair of strappy sandals what anyone thinks about their shoes, their jeans or their dancing.

Before I toddle back to my armchair to pour myself a Scotch and watch the racing (now *that* sounds like my dad), I want to draw your attention to a new book by one of our contributors. AA Gill's *Pour Me* is the most affecting, arresting, wisest, most searching and honest memoir I've read in a long time. There is a dazzling line — one you want to write down and remember — on almost every page. We all know, from his work for *The Sunday Times* and, indeed, *Esquire*, that Adrian is clever and waspish and potty-mouthed and all the rest of it. But still, his book brings you up short, it makes you catch your

breath, fight back tears. And, of course, it makes you laugh, sometimes at the same moment you are fighting back tears. Nominally, it is about the period between the end of his first marriage and his giving up drinking. But it's much more capacious and more generous than that, switching back and forth from his childhood to the present day.

There are moving passages about his dad, the last man he drank with: Champagne on the train to the clinic he entered at 30, in 1985, since when he has not touched a drop. And he writes briefly about his kids, too, about what they mean to him, and how his life has been changed for the better by having them in it. The soppy sod.

I am proud to be publishing an extract from *Pour Me* in this issue. But don't stop there. Buy it, read it, and get one for your dad, or your son, while you're at it.

Alex Bilmes, Editor-in-Chief

2015 has been a year of dad-bashing. We've had dad bods, dad dancing, dad cars, dad jeans and, most recently, the dad sandal



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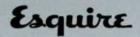


# POLORED RALPH LAUREN



THE MEN'S FRAGRANCE BY HALPH LAUREN





# Esquire Style

Fashion / Grooming / Tech / Food / Cars Edited by Teo van den Broeke



## Admit it: you fancy a Volvo

You never thought it would happen (we never thought it would happen, either) but you've begun to lust after a sensible, risk-averse, Swedish SUV. And it feels good, dammit

→ What was your fantasy ride when you were a small boy? A Porsche 911? A white Ferrari Testarossa, like the one Don Johnson drove in Miami Vice? A 007-approved Aston Martin? Or maybe an American muscle car:

a Dodge Charger, perhaps? And a soft-top Mercedes SL for the future Mrs Dream-On-It'll-Never-Happen?

Times change. And while chances are you still look admiringly at twoseater sports cars, you may also

occasionally find yourself sizing up, roomier, more practical (not to mention cost-effective) vehicles. Not only for obvious reasons but because, weirdly, they're kind of sexy. Yes, even Volvos. Specifically, the new

#### Volvo XC90

Engine 2-ltr four-cylinder petrol

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Volvo XC90, which might just be the most handsome high-end SUV currently on the road, beating off stiff competition from BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, Audi, VW, Lexus (they're all at it now) and, of course, Range Rover.

As you would expect of Volvo, there are enough safety features to satisfy the most paranoid parent as well as more on-board touch-screen technology than Silicon Valley. For a tank-like seven-seater, driving is a serene experience, whether you choose the top-end 407bhp petrol/plug-in electric hybrid T8 model with a tax-beating 49g/km CO2 emission rating or the sturdy, easier on the wallet 225bhp diesel.

But surprisingly, perhaps, the XC90's trump card is its stand-out design. The cabin is reassuringly Scandinavian: matte-finish, light-coloured wood, cream leather and cool, brushed aluminium. And on the outside, the aggressive new grille and the "Thor hammer" LED headlamps are masculine enough to appeal to the small boy inside us all. Until next year. volvocars.com/uk



#### Look out, Range Rover. In 2016, the prestige SUV war picks up speed...



#### 01 BENTLEY BENTAYGA

Seeking to be the ultimate luxury SUV, Bentley has all the usual (for Bentley) high-end leather, wood and chrome, along with the highly unusual; a mechanical Breitling tourbillon dashboard clock option that instantly inflates the car's price by £110,000 and, as its interior designer quips, turns the Bentayga into "the most expensive watch-winder in the world". bentleymotors.com

Prices from £160,200-£230,000; on sale early 2016



#### 02 JAGUAR F-PACE

Bigger than a Porsche Macan, smaller than an Audi Q7 and better-looking than both, the Jaguar F-Pace moves the English saloon and sports car maker into stylish and practical crossover territory. With F-Type design influence (and engines) and some off-roading know-how from sister marque Land Rover, we suspect it could be a big hit. Jaguar.co.uk

Prices from £34,200; on sale mid-2016



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"Strong. Sophisticated. State-of-the-art." That's the tagline for the 2016 iteration of the now long-running Mercedes M-Class — a marvel of technological innovation and engineering expertise. There's a diesel, a hybrid, a V8 plug-in and a Bentley-bothering AMG GLE63 S that'll get you to 62mph in 4.2 seconds. Looks like a tank, goes like a rocket, basically. mercedes-benz.co.uk

Prices from £49,280; on sale now



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Creator

"This style takes 320 steps over eight months to handcraft in Japan." £360



Nomad

"Its plastic brow detailing is inspired by Jean-Paul Belmondo." £410



Mach-One

"Inspired by the love of fast cars, quick boats and sleek planes." £520



**Statesman** 

"Inspired by Hollywood's iconic Golden Age, Sam Smith is a fan of these." £440



Westbound

"The Westbound combines custom Japanese acetate with titanium temples."



#### **Grandreserve Two**

"Kevin Hart is a fan of this frame, a slimmer version of the Statesman." £430



#### Cooper

"Combines a clean Japanese acetate front with acetate/titanium temples." £400



Flight 005

"This came about after a pilot asked us if we could create a navigator." £320

### **20:20 vision**

# American eyewear experts Dita celebrate two decades producing some of the world's finest specs

→ Inspired by their favourite vintage frames, John Juniper and Jeff Solorio founded Dita 20 years ago in Los Angeles. Today, the company manufactures its specs in Japan, with each taking between six months and a year to complete. It's this level of perfectionism that has attracted fans from Brad Pitt to Tinie Tempah and, ahem, Usher. And the frames? They come with the heft you'd expect for the prices, and the retro-meets-contemporary aesthetic feels right. To mark Dita's 20th birthday, we asked its founders to select their 20 best frames. Credit cards at the ready! dita.com



#### **Thom Browne TB-105**

"These feature Thom Browne's signature on the inverted side of the temple." £470



**Talon** 

"This aviator-style features a titanium frame, temples and nose pads." £320



**Traveler** 

"Inspired by the film *Morning Glory*. It's a classic yet contemporary style." £260



Union

"LA's art deco-style Union train station inspired this frame." £350



#### **Grandmaster-Five**

"The Grandmaster-Five is a marvel of design and manufacturing excellence." £650



#### **Baylor**

"The frame and temples are handcrafted from quality Japanese acetate." £220



#### Raleigh

"The titanium temples of this frame are finished with a diamond detail." £220



#### Stranger

"This is part of an ultra-light series of classic men's frames."
£350



#### Journey

"A far more face-friendly version of John Lennon's famous frame." £340



#### **Thom Browne TB-807**

"These walnut frames boast 12k gold-plated temples and signature tips." £430



#### Father and son tailors Casely-Hayford mix contemporary design with Savile Row quality

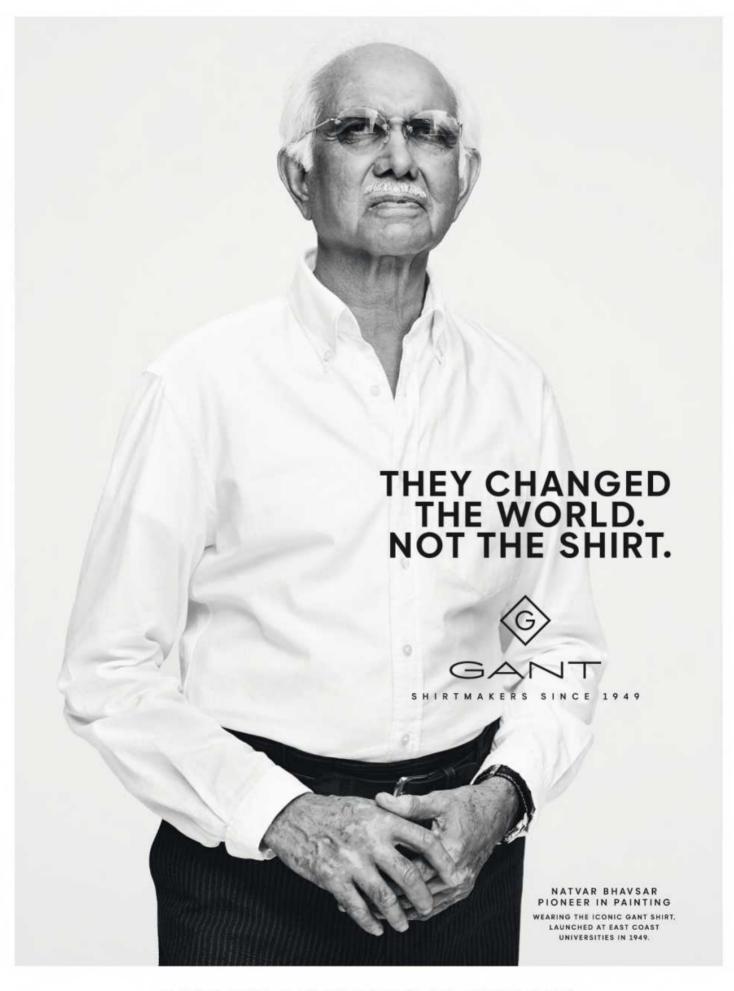
→ A new generation of tailors are eschewing the rules of Savile Row in favour of a more contemporary approach.

One such designer is Charlie Casely-Hayford. Son of Joe Casely-Hayford, who made his name with irreverent tailoring in the Nineties, the father and son now work together producing suits, separates and casual pieces for the likes of Michael Fassbender and Robert Downey Jr.

Esquire sent Style director Teo van den Broeke to try out the pair's personal service. "I opted for a deep blue shawl-collar single-breasted two-piece in a stiff yet soft

Reda fabric, which, despite portraying a smart crispness, feels like jersey against the skin," he says. "Cut slim in the leg with an elegantly cropped hem, the jacket is nipped at the waist without being constricting, the armholes are cut high and the shoulders are soft."

Starting from just £1,295, you can choose from 3,000 sumptuous Italian and English fabrics and the whole process takes five to six weeks. Casely-Hayford's personal tailoring service will not only result in one of the best suits you've worn, but also one that is great value.







oriander



Angelics



Oreis
(00t) From Jolle

# THE ULTIMATE GIN & TONIC



ENJOY BOMBAY SAPPHIRE GIN RESPONSIBLY

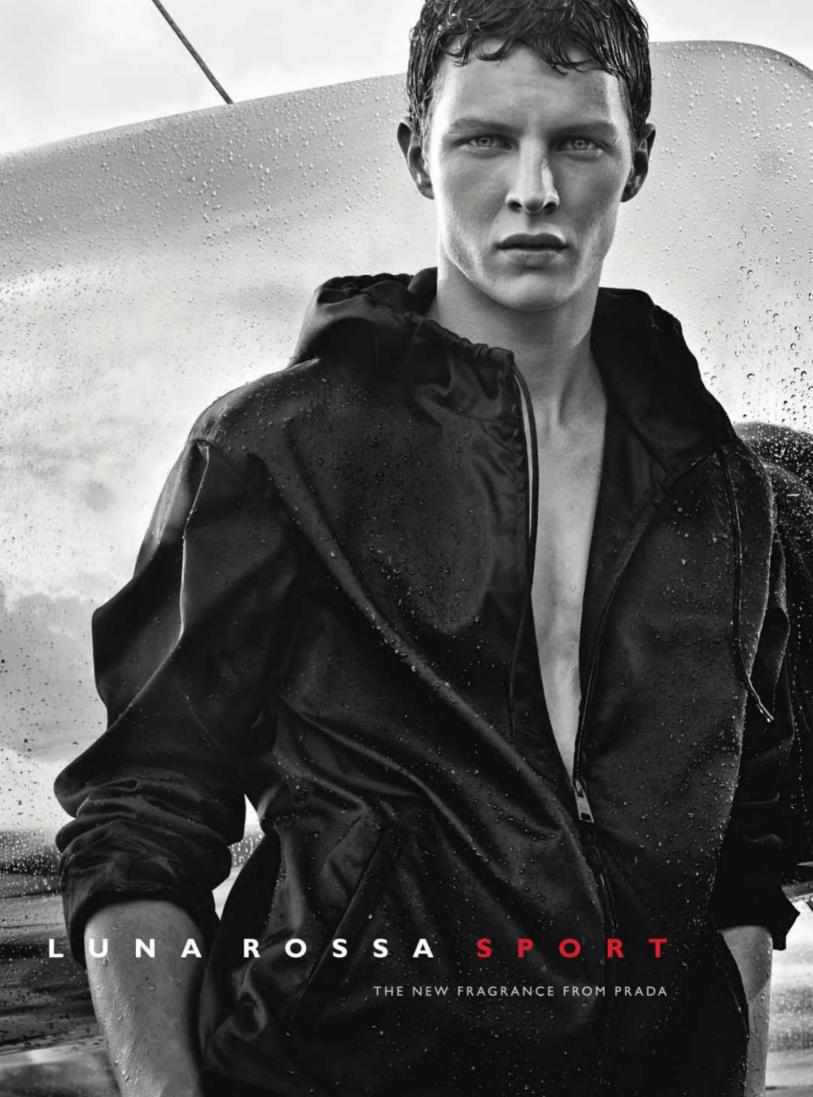
drinkaware.co.uk

BOMBAY SAPPHIRE AND ITS TRADE DRESS ARE TRADEMARKS

# VAPOUR INFUSED WITH BEAUTIFUL BOTANICALS FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH



#FINDSUBLIME







#### 3. Grill press

To keep your cuts nice and flat (if you like your bacon American-style, for instance), this Lodge meat press is the handy tool to use. If you're in a rush, it will keep meat pressed evenly to cook faster on the hot surface.

£40, divertimenti.co.uk

#### 4. Carving board

Hand-carved from a single piece of London plane tree wood, this board by Hackney company Hampson Woods is designed for carving meat, and was originally produced for the Hawksmoor restaurant chain. If they use it, you know it's good.

5. Carving set

With horn-tipped handles and adorned with the famous Aubrac fly motif, this carving set by Laguiole is a handsome-looking addition to your kitchen arsenal. Blades made by Laguiole are also world renowned for their sharpness. £220, harrods.com

#### 6. Mincer

There are electric mincers on the market, of course, but nothing beats the feel and heft of one that's clamped to a table and turned by hand. This one, by Thomas Plant, is made from sturdy cast iron, and comes with three sizes of mincing disc.

#### 7. Cleaver

To step up your steak game into butchery, you'll need a good cleaver. This one by Victorinox, one of the best-trusted names in knives (see chef Marcus Wareing on page 104), is made from ice-tempered high carbon stainless steel.

£36, nisbets.co.uk

#### 8. Meat hammer

Use this to make tougher, less frequently used cuts of meat much more tender and toothsome. Its weight is evenly distributed (for optimum whacking), and it features a flat side for flattening out meat and a burled side for tenderising. £32.50, rosle.co.uk

#### 9. Skillet

When cooking steak on the hob, you need the pan to be as hot as possible, and the best heat -retainer is thick cast iron. Le Creuset is perhaps the most respected name in the pan industry, so this is your first choice. £100, lecreuset.co.uk

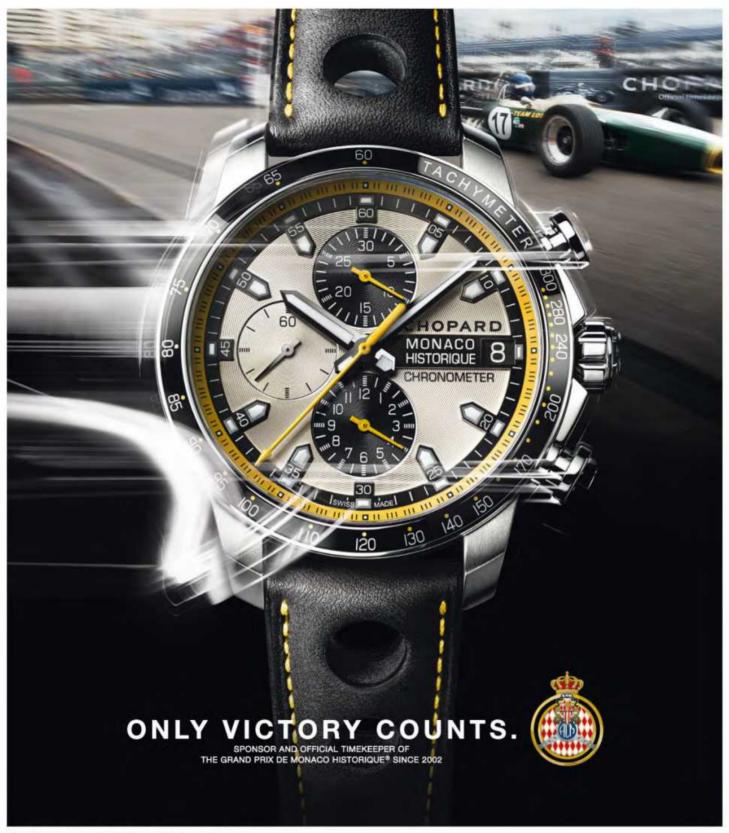
#### 10. Grill tongs

Using your fingers to turn your sizzling steaks is a terrible idea, for obvious reasons, so you'll need some tongs. Tom Dixon's are designed in London and the copper-plated finish offers some pleasing aesthetic relief to all the fire and smoking pans.









GRAND PRIX DE MONACO HISTORIQUE CHRONO (168570-3001)

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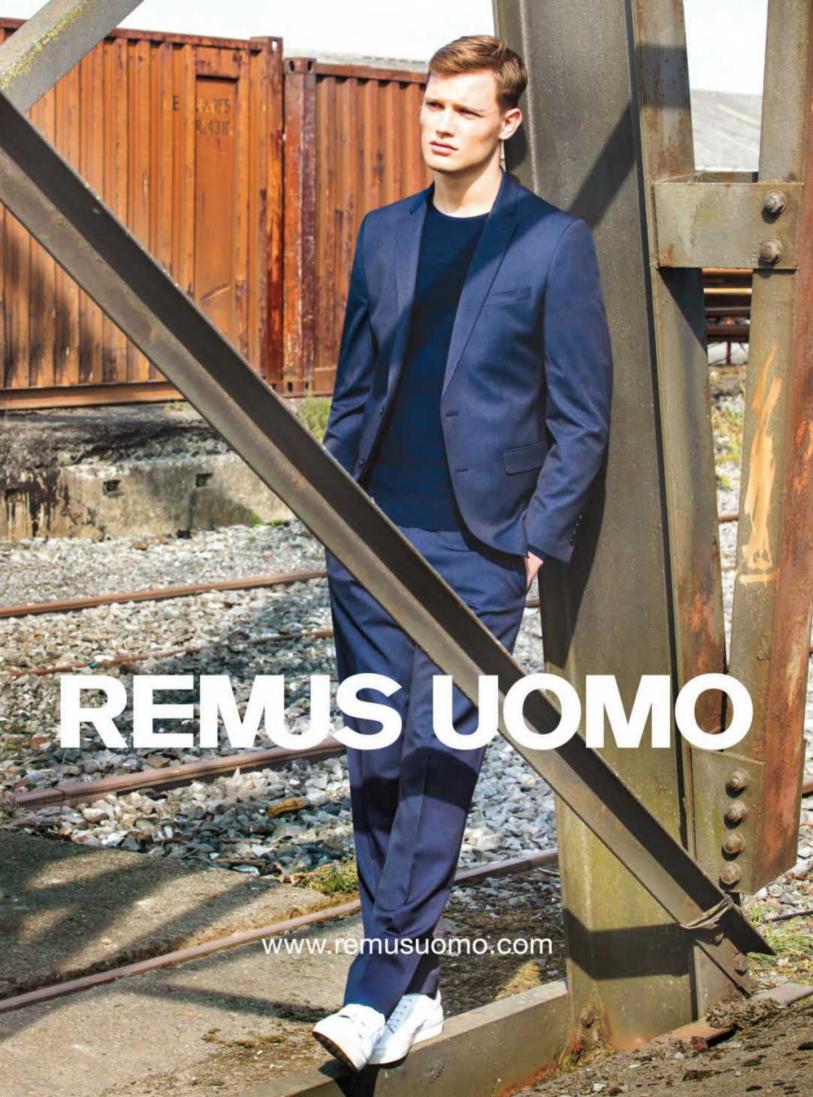


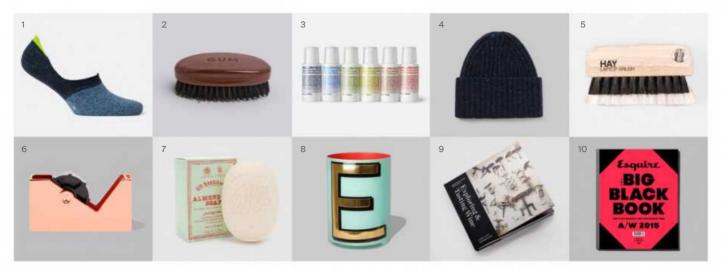






# TOPMAN





→ I went to a wedding last weekend at Hardwick House in Oxfordshire, apparently the inspiration for Kenneth Grahame's Toad Hall in Wind in the Willows. The Elizabethan manor, surrounded by meadows that lead down to the banks of the Thames, was once home to Sir Charles Day Rose. The colourful baron had ebullient enthusiasms for fast cars — "Poop! Poop!" — real tennis, horse racing and aeroplanes. He died in 1913 from a heart attack induced by the excitement of flying in one of the latter at Hendon Aerodrome.

The reason I mention this, besides expanding your literary references, is that Mr Toad's wardrobe — colourful checked tailoring, tweeds, flat caps, and oversized camel-toned wool coats — is remarkably similar to many of the looks designers showed for this winter. Unsurprisingly, none of them cited Mr Toad as inspiration — he's never quite made it as an official muse alongside Kurt Cobain, Andy Warhol and James Dean — but the evidence is there all the same.

Italian labels such as Barena,
Isaia and Massimo Piombo designed
bold plaid blazers in a variety of rich
colours, Gucci and Richard James
sent out equally bold checked suits,
Burberry Prorsum, Ami and Officine
Generale went for oversized overcoats
in checks or camel, while Wooster
+ Lardini and Acne have thick tweed
jackets in Toad-ish patterns or colours.

Finally, hats of all shapes and sizes have had a resurgence in popularity over the last year or so. I'm not convinced by the plethora of fedoras this winter (a little too statement-y for me), but the flat cap seems a respectable and practical nod in the right direction. Italian milliner Borsalino has a smart navy wool one

THE STYLE COLUMN

## Jeremy Langmead

What to buy the men in your life this year

that would do for work or weekend, whilst Musto Shooting has an on-trend checked tweed example which is very Mr Toad indeed.

Of course, pop all of these on at once and you may look a little cartoonish, but a bold checked blazer or overcoat will help beat the winter gloom, give this season's popular greys and blacks a bit of a lift, and update your wardrobe in an instant. Since I like to shop what I preach, I have bought a sprinkling of the above in order to road-test the trends before I recommend them to you. I know, I know, I mustn't let you all take advantage of my good nature. I promise it's the last time I'll selflessly buy an eye-wateringly expensive Tom Ford grey herringbone jacket just so that I can be sure you all might like it, too. In fact, the camel Bottega Veneta overcoat I wondered about on your behalf was a step too far, as well.

My bank manager certainly seems to think so; especially when you also

tot up the amount reached by adding a Brunello Cucinelli gilet, a pair of Tod's suede Chelsea boots, a Saint Laurent pinstripe suit and a grey Tom Ford cotton-jersey sweatshirt. My credit card is so max'd out that I fear from now on it's TK Maxx for me. (There are actually some good bargains to be found there; I find the Brent Cross branch in North London the most fruitful.)

As you can clearly see, the season of goodwill to all men has turned out to be focused on just one man: me. While I feel I can potentially come to terms with that fact, it has meant my resources for gifting others is somewhat limited this Christmas. So, if like me, you're hunting around for gifts for blokes that are chic and cheap, here's a few I've come across so far:

- Loafer socks by Mr Gray, £14. These are the perfect fit and fabric.
- 2 Beard brush by Gum, £35. The recipient needs a beard. Not for wives or mums.
- 3 Essential travel kit by Malin & Goetz, £20. All you need to look and smell fresh in cabin-friendly sizes.
- Donegal knit beanie by Oliver Spencer, £50. Everyone will look good in these.
- 5 Laptop brush by Hay, £13. One of those things you didn't know you needed.
- Tool stationery by Tom Dixon, from £10.
   From paper clips to sticky-tape holders in copper and gold hues.
- 7 Almond oil soap set by DR Harris, £28. Beautiful old-fashioned packaging, great gentlemanly smell.
- Alphabet brush pots by Pentreath & Hall, £40. Perfect for pens (or brushes).
- Exploring and Tasting Wine: a Wine
   Course with Digressions by Berry Bros
   Rudd Wine School, £30. Easy to follow, neat to look at, yummy to act upon.
- 10 Naturally, it would be remiss of me not to recommend Esquire's Big Black Book,

  A/W 2015, £6, and The Mr Porter

  Paperback, £50 per set of three.





#### **PureTech ENGINES**



## Get carried away

Bottega Veneta's Cabat bags are handwoven from exotic leathers

→ Founded in Vicenza in 1966, Bottega Veneta is known for superlative leather goods, most notably its iconic intrecciato woven leather holdalls, wallets and trolley bags. Catching our eye this season are the label's latest Cabat tote bags, handmade by artisans in La Scuola dei Maestri Pellettieri di Bottega Veneta, an 18th-century villa in Montebello Vicentino. Each bag is woven from calf leather (ostrich, python and crocodile are also offered) and runs of each bag are limited to a maximum 1,000 per year. Finished with solid silver plaques displaying individual batch numbers, it might look like a bag for the beach, but is better kept away from sand — or anything other than the seat of your car. Bottega Veneta's new London store is at 14 Old Bond Street, W1; bottegaveneta.com



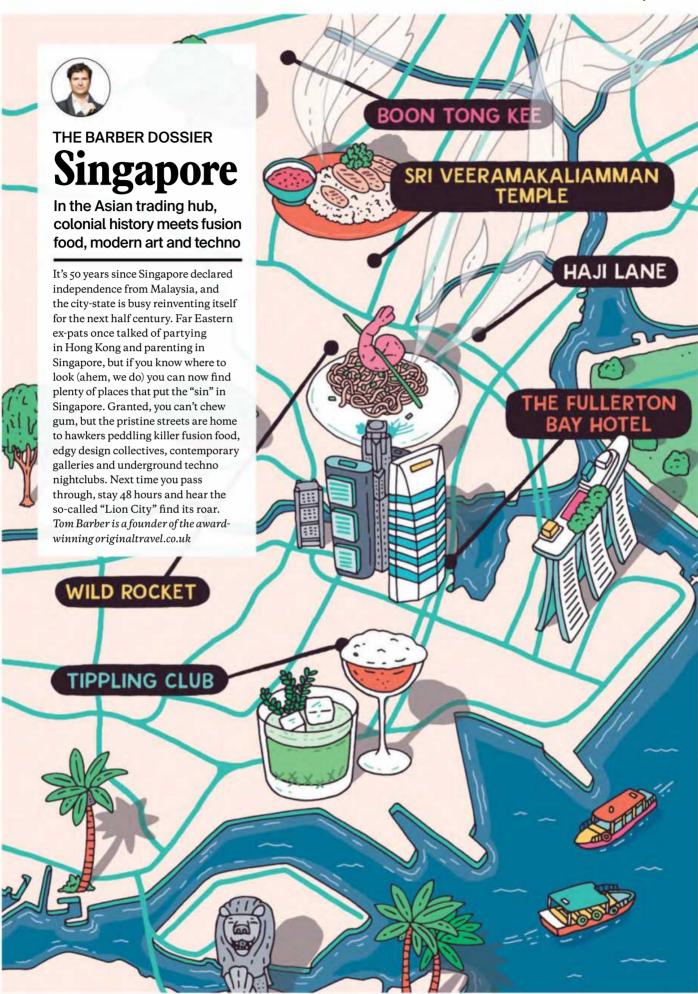
#### The Chuck Taylor All Star



The Wookick Collection



Made by you





#### Lunch >

Chef Travis Masiero channels New England at Luke's Oyster Bar and Chop House, with much of the shellfish coming direct from Maine and Massachusetts, USA. Food miles will be forgotten after a dozen Wellfleet oysters, lump crab cakes and an Aussie Cloudburst chardonnay. *lukes.com.sg* 

#### Shop

Top tip: head to Singapore without hand luggage and pick up a bag by local designers Gnome & Bow, whose range is inspired by stories such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; cue split personality messenger bags and backpacks with different designs front and back. *gnomenbow.com* 



#### See 1

Asian art is hot, as you'll find at Gillman Barracks, an ex-British Army base now housing a hub of 16 contemporary art galleries (sorry, spaces) and museums. The smart art investor will particularly note ARNDT, whose East Berlin origins lend instant cred, and who now represent Asian and Pacific artists. gillmanbarracks.com

#### **Party**

Club Kyo may be in the heart of the Central Business District, but it's pleasure central and still hopping come 6am Sunday morning. In its intimate, elegant interior, delicious sake-based cocktails are served from one of the city's longest bars amid pumping dance beats from international DJs. This ex-bank, in short, is a banker. clubkyo.com

#### **Avoid**

A Singapore Sling cocktail (invented 100 years ago) in the Long Bar at Raffles Hotel unless your name is Derek, you've just pressed the front creases into your khaki trousers and you're with your lady wife, Maureen.

Dine

Chef Willin Low at Wild Rocket

cooking, reinventing recipes

coined the phrase and concept of

"mod Sin" (modern Singaporean)

made famous by the city's Indian,

Chinese and Malaysian street-

food hawkers (on which more

a Japanese teahouse is a zen

retreat from the urban hubbub

miss the spanner chilli crab

linguini with onsen egg

wildrocket.com.sg

Drink 4

outside. Under no circumstances

The seven- and 11-course tasting

a mention, sure, but we go for the leftfield and tasty cocktails. Treat

menus at Tippling Club merit

yourself to a Smashing Good

rum, fresh thyme, citrus and...

green peas. tipplingclub.com

Thyme of Bacardi Carta Blanca

later). His hillside (rare here)

restaurant designed like

#### Get there

BA, Virgin and Singapore Airlines all operate slick direct services.

#### Stay ←

Clifford Pier in Marina Bay Sands is where many of Singapore's 20th-century immigrants made landfall, and now you'll want to migrate to the new Fullerton Bay Hotel. The hotel artfully blends colonial and cutting edge style in its 100 rooms and four restaurants, literally hitting the heights at the rooftop Lantern Bar and pool overlooking the harbour and city skyline. fullertonbayhotel.com

#### Do

Experience the city's various quarters for a reminder of Singapore's melting pot diversity. Chow down on delectable dim sum in Chinatown, visit the quintessentially Hindu Sri Veeramakaliamman temple in Little India, and peruse the hipster "shophouses" on Haji Lane in the Muslim Quarter, one of the very few places the authorities allow street art. chinatown.sg; sriveeramakaliamman.com

#### When in...

Eat on the street: Singapore gives Oaxaca in Mexico a run for its street food money. You'll be spoilt for variations and venues, so stick with Singaporean staple chicken rice, where the chook is marinated in pork stock and served on ginger and garlic-laced rice topped with red chilli sauce. The best is at any Boon Tong Kee outlet, ideally in Balestier (buy its chilli sauce for home). boontongkee.com.sg

#### Why now?

The first Singapore Contemporary Art Show runs 21–24 January. Chinese New Year starts on 8 February when the city's Chinese indulge in a festival of fireworks and fish-salad tossing (long story).





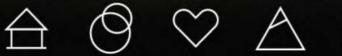


MADE FOR THE MODERN TRAIL











**BLACK FOREST COLLECTION F/W 2015** 





# And what's in Oliver Spencer's?

The designer gives us a peek inside his bag

#### Leica camera

Taking pictures is part of my life. Phones are good, but there's something about looking through a lens and pushing a button.

#### **Compass**

In a city you've not visited before, it's hard to know which way is east or west. So, I use my compass and it's job done.

#### **Book**

I often find myself in airport lounges, bored. I tend to only read autobiographies: my last one was Keith Richards' *Life*.

#### **Notebook**

I have a Moleskine notebook and a Sheaffer fountain pen so I can write or sketch ideas, but not as often as I should.

#### Bag

An Oliver Spencer doctor's bag in caramel pebble grain leather. It seems to get better every time I use it.







# Paul Smith ESSENTIAL

**ESSENTIAL** 

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THE NEW FRAGRANCE

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[THE EDIT]
TEXTURED LAYERING



# ASPINAL LONDON



#### THE MACKLIN REGIME

# Eating clean and lean on the move

Too busy to linger over lunch? Try these

→ Diet is, unquestionably, the essential component when striving for physical and mental greatness. In an ideal world, we'd rustle up fancy lunches the night before work and be home at a reasonable hour to muster up that six-pack-carving culinary wonder. If, like me, that's completely unachievable and time is lacking, eating clean and lean on the go can be far easier and more fun than you'd imagine. Ignore faddy diets, this is simple — high protein, low sugar, unrefined carbs, plenty of greens and easy on the booze. If you're building muscle, you'll need to incorporate your nine amino acids; quinoa is the perfect "good carb" for this. Here's how to do it.

# ing for p fancy p fancy price to nat's il lean gnore carbs, ele, e perfect

#### Best for...



#### **Breakfast meetings**

Soho House, 76 Dean Street, London W1

Our favourite here is avocado on wholegrain toast with poached eggs and a side of smoked salmon (£9). It's an excellent source of essential fatty acids to aid brain functionality, omega 3 to promote heart health and low cholesterol, plus protein to build muscle mass. The enemy is refined carbs, which spike blood sugar levels and have been stripped of their nutritional qualities, so avoid croissants, white bread and muffins. sohohouse.com



#### **Bespoke fitness**

Fresh Fitness Food, online

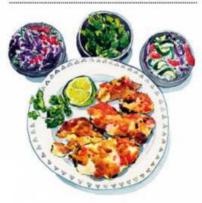
Functional and requiring minimal effort, this is a good option if you are training for an event or working on that holiday body and have no time to prepare food. Elite nutritionists, fitness experts and a Michelin star-trained meal consultant plan your fitness goals and dietary requirements to improve health and optimise training. Its cooked, reheatable dishes are delivered to you each morning, labelled in order of consumption. freshfitnessfood.com



#### Desk snacks

Moosh, Kingly Court, Soho, London W1

The Endurance shake at Moosh — protein, blueberries, peanut butter, almond milk, mixed seeds, cinnamon — is a hearty drink that will keep hunger at bay while delivering key amino acids, protein for muscle recovery and nutrients such as cinnamon that will help balance blood sugar levels. In a nutshell, a chocolate milkshake that's actually good for you and, all things considered, a healthy bargain at £5 each. mooshfruit.com



#### Saturday brunch

Dishoom, various London locations

A homage to Sixties Iranian café culture, Dishoom offers a wide selection of healthy, gluten and dairy-free Indian food, within a stylish interior with a lively vibe. Their sustainably sourced fish is grilled and all the food is tasty, high in nutritional value and not loaded with nasties. Order the Mahi Tikka (sustainable Asian basa fillet), a bowl of greens, Dishoom slaw and kachumber for £17.20. dishoom.com



#### Training with a takeout

Natural Fitness Food, The Third Space Gyms, Soho and Marylebone, central London

High-protein meals, snacks and shakes freshly prepared each morning are both tasty and substantial, and available to non-gym members, too. Nutritional values are helpfully displayed on the front so you can track your daily intake. The menu alternates daily and includes turkey, salmon, tuna, steak and vegetarian options. Protein balls go well with your morning coffee. thethirdspace.com



#### Sunday roast

The Ambrette, Margate, Kent

Casting aside the notion that Sunday roasts need to be a guilty pleasure, The Ambrette's "Great Exotic Sunday Roast" features free range meats (including zebra) and trades the heavy sides for alternative accompaniments like stir-fried spinach, which is high in protein and iron, wild nettle and sweet potato hash — a nutritional powerhouse high in fibre — and homemade gravy. Prices range from £13 to £20. theambrette.co.uk



# BVLGARI



MAN
IN BLACK

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# CURATORS OF THE WORLD'S MOST EXQUISITE WATCHES

Adding to your watch collection by finding exactly what you are looking for can be a time-consuming process. The Watch Gallery and its finely tuned team of online experts make it straightforward. The live-chat function on-site allows you to liaise directly with an expert and the concierge team has over 25 years experience. Combine this with an unrivalled selection of luxury brands, it's no wonder this is where The Watch Gallery excels: service. For more information and to view the full product portfolio, visit www.thewatchgallery.com







## 30 years young

Tommy Hilfiger celebrates three fashionable decades with a special all-American collection



## Hilfiger on style

""Stylish" is about confidence, self expression, and not taking yourself too seriously or being afraid to try new things. And it's a timeless quality that extends beyond years and decades."



Navy/red leather/wool varsity jacket, £300



Grey cotton T-shirt, £40



Navy/white baseball shirt. £40



a gleefully all-American
capsule collection. In line
with Hilfiger's inherent
preppy aesthetic, highlig
sweatshirt, £70 include a baseball shirt



→ One of the most well known megabrands in modern fashion, Tommy Hilfiger's success has sustained admirably since its founding 30 years ago, and rather cheekily, we're going to take some of the credit. In 1985, Hilfiger approached former US Esquire art director George Lois to help with his new ad campaign. The result was the now-famous "great American designers" ad poster which made him a household name overnight.

Three decades later,
Hilfiger is still at the top and
to celebrate, he's created
a gleefully all-American
capsule collection. In line
with Hilfiger's inherent
preppy aesthetic, highlights
include a baseball shirt

emblazoned with the relevant number, a great jersey sweater trimmed with red, white and blue, and a hefty "team captain" jacket in rich blue wool and leather. Clearly, Mr Hilfiger's penchant for stateside cool is alive and stronger than ever.

"When I was just starting out in the fashion industry, I dreamed of having a global lifestyle brand, but I never could have expected that our company would grow on such an incredible scale," Hilfiger says. "This anniversary is an incredible milestone, and I'm excited to celebrate with our limitededition capsule collection that modernises our favourite wardrobe classics as new everyday staples." uk.tommy.com

Above: Tommy Hilfiger in 1987. Below: The 1985 ad poster that made his name (with a little help and expertise from George Lois)



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BURLINGTON ARCADE · MAYFAIR · LONDON · W1 · BURLINGTONARCADE.COM



Porsche recommends Mobil III and Land

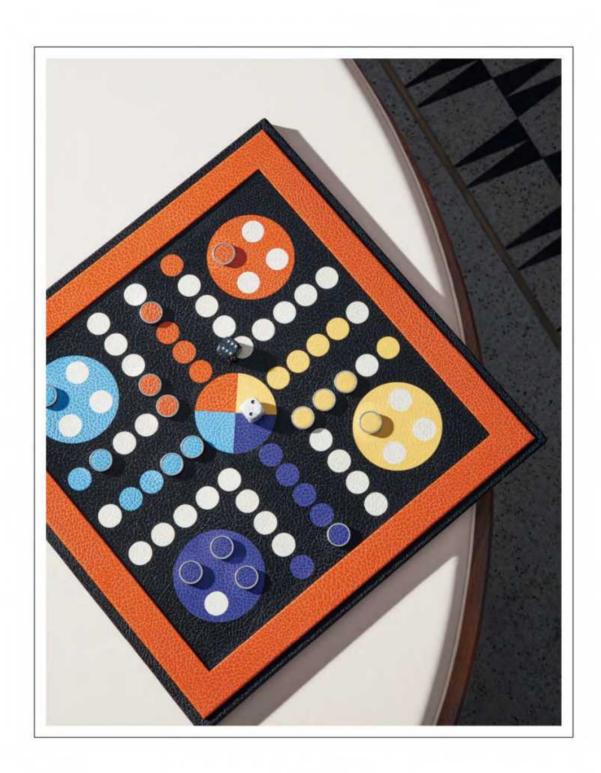
If history is any indication, you're looking at the future of sports cars.

The new 911. Ever ahead.

Discover more at porsche.co.uk/911.









# WILLIAM & SON

LONDON

## THE RELUCTANT COOK

## Russell Norman's festive rules

Christmas morning is still a little way off. That's no excuse not to be fully prepared



→ Whatever your opinion of Christmas, there's no denying it dominates December. It looms on the event horizon, exerting the gravitational pull of a small neutron star. This can be a challenge if your attitude to Yuletide is more Ebenezer Scrooge than eggnog. But if, like me, you get as giddy as a kiddy, then it means three weeks of barely contained glee. Christmas Day, however, is a different kettle of fish altogether.

There is the main event, of course, which is the same in every household: you must prepare the biggest Sunday lunch of the year (aka, Christmas dinner.) You must cook turkey instead of chicken. You must always refer to it as Christmas dinner, never Christmas lunch. But it is the peripheral feasting, snacking, munching and imbibing that interests me, as there is an implicit permission to eat and drink as much as you like all day. My strategy

Above: Norman prepares the zest for his salmon, horseradish and dill crostini for getting through the assault course of indulgence is to be at the helm, in front of the stove, for the duration.

Once all the presents are open (usually by 5am if your children are anything like mine), I volunteer to make and do everything. Tea and toast, followed by breakfast, bubbles and brunch. Then the dinner, the wine and the pudding, followed by cocktails, cheese board, port, postprandials, coffees and chocolates.

Plus all the washing up, all the cleaning and all the putting away. I get particularly tetchy if anyone tries to do anything in the kitchen. It is my department, my domain; I'm wearing the apron, so I have the power. Having said that, and bearing in mind Christmas Day is a marathon not a sprint, it is essential that you pace things properly. You don't want to be feeling peaky having eaten all the mince pies by 11 o'clock and you certainly don't want to be slurring over the sprouts at three.

For this reason, I always make something gentle like Bellinis in the morning (one bottle of very cold

# "At Christmas, the kitchen is my domain; I'm wearing the apron, so I have the power"

prosecco upended into a large pitcher, 150ml of white peach purée, stirred together and poured into small chilled tumblers) accompanied by a simple snack like smoked or cured salmon crostini with horseradish and dill. It really is the perfect way to kick-start the day and get the feast underway.

The following recipe is one of my favourite preparations for salmon.

It can be sliced thinly for use in salads or as part of a cold platter. It's also a sensation in a bagel with cream cheese, cracked pepper and lemon juice. The quantities here will yield more than you need for your holiday morning snacks, so keep the leftovers wrapped in cling film in the fridge where they will be good for a week. Prepare the salmon two days in advance and make sure you use an extremely sharp slicing knife.

Instagram: @Russell\_Norman Russell's new book Spuntino: Comfort Food (New York Style) is out now, published by Bloomsbury











## Beet-cured salmon, horseradish and dill crostini

#### Makes 18 pieces

- 250g raw beetroot, peeled and grated
- 75g flaky sea salt
- 75g caster sugar
- 1 handful dill, roughly chopped
- 18 small dill fronds for finishing
- 6 black peppercorns, crushed
- Zest of 2 oranges
- 50ml vodka
- 500g lean salmon fillet, skinned and cleaned
- 1 baguette
- Horseradish sauce (I like Colman's)
- Juice of 1 lemon

### Method

1 Mix the beetroot, salt, sugar, chopped dill, black pepper, zest and vodka together. Spread half the mixture on the bottom of a plastic container roughly the same size as the salmon fillet. Place the fish on the bed of ingredients and use the remainder to create a blanket all around the salmon.

2 Put a sheet of cling film over the top and weigh down with something heavy. Put the container in the fridge and leave for 36–48 hours. When you remove the salmon, it will have changed colour to a beautiful deep red.

3 Rinse the curing ingredients off under cold running water, pat dry with kitchen towel and then carefully carve as thinly as possible. You need 18 generous slices.

4 Meanwhile, cut the baguette at an angle into 18 elliptical discs, and lightly toast them on both sides under a grill. Lay a slice of beet-cured salmon on each, place a small dollop of horseradish sauce on top, and finish with a dill sprig and a few drops of lemon juice. Trust me, with this as your opening gambit, accompanied by the Bellinis, you'll be more of a hero than Santa on the big day.







# CHAMPAGNE BOLLINGER

MAISON FONDÉE EN 1829

# SPECTRE

**ONLY IN CINEMAS** 



## THE CHAMPAGNE OF JAMES BOND

## Touch and go

## Winter fashion is all about feeling

→ This season's best menswear is as much about the correct fabric as the right cut. While cotton, wool-blends and denim have their place, as ever, there's also room for materials that offer more unusual textures. From teasled, boiled wool coats to brushed alpaca-wool bomber jackets and dense mohair jumpers, right now it's all about copping a good feel.



## Brushed alpaca

This jacket from Oliver Spencer in wool from the South American camelid will look great with selvedge jeans and white trainers. Brown brushed alpaca wool bomber jacket, £520, by Oliver Spencer



## Jumbo corduroy

Teaming jumbo cords with a matching jacket is a step too far. Wear this burgundy pair with chunky walking boots and a cream fair isle knit for a perfect off-duty look. Burgundy jumbo-cord trousers, £550, by Burberry Prorsum



The lightly brushed texture of this Hardy Amies overcoat adds an extra dimension to your outfit. Wear it over a navy double-breasted suit for a natty office-ready look. Bottle-green teasled wool coat, £700, by Hardy Amies

#### Llama wool

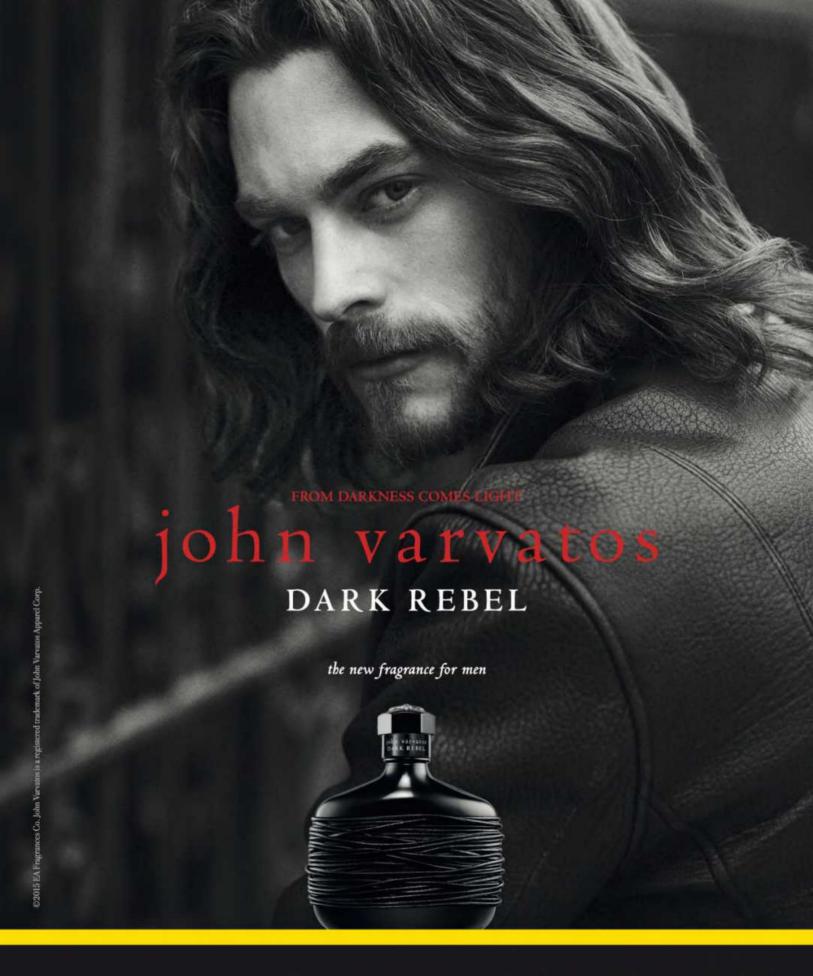
The fur-like texture of this beautiful blazer from Richard James will look great with a crisp fine-gauge woollen crew neck in a slightly darker shade of blue. Something by John Smedley should do it.



### Mohair bouclé

The bobble effect of this brilliantly textured crew-neck jumper from Paul Smith will look great beneath a slim-cut denim jacket. Don't wear with anything else too textured — you'll risk looking a bit tree-huggy. Black wool/mohair bouclé jumper, £350, by Paul Smith





## Esquire. Mavericks

Powered by BMW i

# Designed from the ground up

Innovative and unique, the BMW i3 combines beauty and efficiency in a radical leap forward for dynamic car design



→ Electric vehicles offer car designers the chance to rip up the rule book. But there are some things you shouldn't mess with. "It must remain an emotional product," says Benoit Jacob, head of BMW i Design. "We don't want to give up on emotion. We can make driving more sustainable and more responsible. But this shouldn't be at the expense of beauty and good design. In fact, quite the opposite."

Where traditional internal combustion engine cars have relatively small fuel tanks and bulky engines, with electric vehicles that's no longer the case, which has a huge influence on design potential. "It really impacts on the proportions," Jacob says.

Jacob and his team have looked past car design to product and furniture



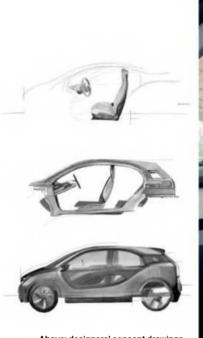
Benoit Jacob

Jacob has been head of BMW i Design, the BMW sub-brand, since 2010. His unconventional approach to design has been the resolute pursuit of sustainability

design, even architecture, to visualise the BMW i3. The exterior features a flowing silhouette and long wheelbase to give ample space in the passenger compartment. Housing the energy storage in the floor completely opens up the interior since there is no centre powertrain. Sustainable eucalyptus, naturally tanned leather and fibres from a tropical cotton family are used in the interior, expanding traditional notions of premium. "The mindset is totally different," says Jacob. Another influence is the potential customer.

"The look and feel is very different from other cars, for the simple reason many of the people who would drive it are people who want to change something themselves," Benoit says. "They all share a need for innovation."









## Big ideas: get to know these other design mavericks



Tony Fadell, CEO, Nest Labs The former senior vicepresident of Apple's iPod division, Fadell has been

referred to as "the father of the iPod" for his pioneering work with Steve Jobs. Famously, the iPod rejuvenated Apple,



Yves Béhar, founder, fuseproject Yves Béhar and his company fuseproject may not be international

household names, at least not yet. But the fact is that over the last ten years, it has been responsible for some of the new millennium's most covetable, welldesigned and defining products for the home and office—Jambox speakers, the SodaStream Play and Hive thermostats.

## "We can make driving more sustainable and more responsible" — Benoit Jacob, head of BMW i Design

rerouted the music industry and changed the way the world consumes media. Fadell went on to found California-based Nest Labs, which tackles another universal experience — household tech. Leading the charge for smart homes, Nest Labs designs and produces self-learning, wi-fi-enabled thermostats, smoke detectors and security systems. With innovative design central to their company ethos, it aims to drag everyday appliances out of the last century.

The multi-award-winning industrial design firm works across the beauty, fashion, furniture and technology industries to combine desirable cult products with a considered dose of social responsibility. "I wanted to be a writer as a teen... storytelling was my first love. In my late teens, design became an obsession as I realised I could express myself through that medium. When I founded fuseproject, its slogan became 'design brings stories to life'," Béhar says.



## **BMW i3**

Engine: electric motor | Power: 168bhp Top speed: 93mph | O-62mph: 7.2 secs Range: up to 100 miles on pure electric | Emissions: 0g/m CO<sub>2</sub> | Price: from £30,980 | Government plug-in car grant: £5,000 towards the price

#### WIN THE ULTIMATE BMW I EXPERIENCE

One lucky Esquire reader will win the use of a BMW i3 and a BMW i8 on separate weekends, plus an ultimate BMW i driving day at Goodwood and tickets to the Goodwood Festival of Speed 2016. Also included is one year's free subscription to Esquire. Visit esquire.co.uk/bmwcompetition for full details of this exclusive reader offer.



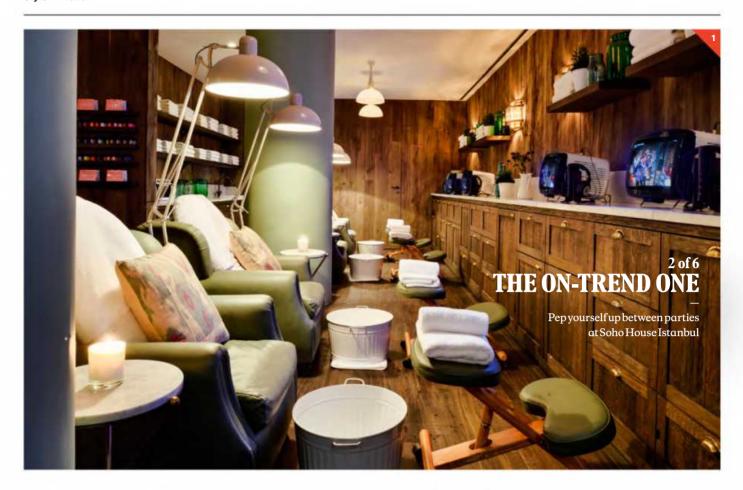
## Find out just how good the numbers look. Visit: mitsubishi-cars.co.uk to find your nearest dealer

1. Official EU MPG test figure shown as a guide for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. 2. 32 mile EV range achieved with full battery charge. 541 miles achieved with combined full battery and petrol tank. Actual range will vary depending on driving style and road conditions. 3. Domestic plug charge: 5 hours, 16 Amp home charge point: 3.5 hours, 80% rapid charge: 30mins. 4. Government subsidised charge points are available from a number of suppliers for a small fee – ask your dealer for more information. 5. Congestion Charge application required, subject to administrative fee. 5. 5% BIX compared to the average rate of 25%. 7. Prices shown include the Government Plug-in Car Grant and VAT (at 20%), but exclude First Registration Fee. Model shown is an Outlander VEQ And a finclude VEQ. First Registration Fee and the Government Plug-in Car Grant and metallic point. On The Road prices are from 229,304 to £36,054 and include VEQ. First Registration Fee and the Government Plug-in Car Grant and metallic point. On The Road prices are from 229,304 to £36,054 and include VEQ. First Registration Fee and the Government Plug-in Car Grant and metallic point. On The Road prices are from 229,304 to £36,054 and include VEQ. First Registration Fee and the Government Plug-in Car Grant sequence of t

Outlander PHEV range fuel consumption in mpg (ltrs/100km): Full Battery Charge: no fuel used, Depleted Battery Charge: 51.4mpg (5.5), Weighted Average: 156.9mpg (1.8), CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: 42 g/km.

## The good spa guide Because men need pampering, too THE BEACH ONE Work on your tan while you wind down on the sugar-white sands of the Seychelles It may take a while to reach the Raffles Praslin resort (our 16-hour journey The treatment Why it's great for men involved a Eurostar from London to Paris, a flight from Paris to the Seychellois capital Mahé, finishing with a seaplane hop from there We opted for the Raffles Praslin The Raffles Praslin is more to Praslin) but the journey is more than worth the effort. Bang in the middle Signature Massage. Incorporating than happy to tailor treatments of the Indian Ocean - it's 2,500km from Africa and a good 4,000km in the the physicality of Thai massage to your specific needs, so if other direction to India - this tiny island paradise is so picturesque it feels and energising Balinese you're suffering from a sports like you've flown onto the set of a Timotei advert. The resort's myriad villas techniques (with a bit of t'ai chi injury, they'll work your massage are built on the mountainous side of the island with unspoilt views over the around it, or if you're dealing thrown in), this intense massage is improbably azure Indian Ocean while its perennial tropical vegetation is far more invigorating than the oily with sunburn (as the majority punctuated with pink hibiscus and yellow frangipani. Once you've made prods you're likely to receive in of male guests, including the most of your personal plunge pool and soaked up some sun on the lesser spas. Perfect if you were ourselves, tended to be) they resort's immaculate private beach, head over to the Praslin spa for a intending to go to Praslin's fully will tailor-make treatments to massage in one of the 13 treatment pavilions, just so you're ready for functioning fitness centre - but soothe the stinging, damaged another few hours of sunbathing and slothing. raffles.com/praslin didn't quite make it down the hill. skin and minimise its redness.

Illustrations by Mark Long 91



With 18.37m visitors last year and a burgeoning arts scene, it's no surprise The Soho House Group chose Istanbul to build the 13th addition to its global portfolio. Between the Bosphorus and the minarets in the Beyoglu area stands Istanbul House, opened in April this year. It took four years to build and centres around the club house, an exquisite 19th century colonial structure designed by Italian architect Giacomo Leoni; once a family home, later a US embassy and now impressively restored to its former grandeur. The imposing stone building encompasses three restaurants, a rooftop infinity pool and bar, The Embassy Club (for late night drinks and resident DJs) and a maze of decadent, high-ceilinged rooms.

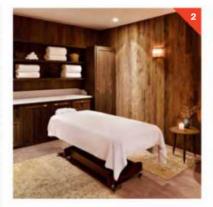
The hotel, a modernist building next door, offers 87 bedrooms, cinema, gym and a vast Cowshed spa that engulfs the lower levels. If you don't fancy being scrubbed to within an inch of your life at a Turkish hamam, Cowshed offers a luxurious alternative. It's a personal experience, almost biblical, as you lie on a marble slate in a heated room, while a multitude of sins are washed away. There is a menu tailored specifically to the male clientele, using Neville products, Soho House's male grooming range. sohohouseistanbul.com

The Cowshed spa room is designed for relaxation

**02** Cowshed spa massage room

**03** Traditional Turkish hamam

**04**The Neville men's barber shop









### The treatment

The Neville Full Works is an hour-long grooming treatment specifically for men, including a facial cleanse, exfoliation, extraction and steam, facial massage and mask, shoulder, neck and scalp massage.

#### Why it's great for men

Framed with dark woodenpanelled walls, leather armchairs, masculine tones and bare concrete pillars this spa is for men. Its well-appointed barber shop offers cuts and treatments, beard and moustache maintenance and traditional wet shaves. The state of the art fitness studio also far exceeds a standard hotel gym.



Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Oman. One guest's memory captured in six words. A true story featuring two of our determined Gentlemen who retrieved a camera from the ocean, returning a guest's treasured photos. What story will you tell? ritzcarlton.com/letusstay





## THE ONE FOR COUPLES

Settle in for a tag team treatment in the South of France

The Chateau Saint-Martin and spa, perched on a peak 460m above sea level in Vence on the Cote d'Azur, offers timeless elegance and luxury in that typically French "if it ain't broke...' fashion Chateau Saint-Martin was built in 1936 on the site of a 12th-century Knights Templar stronghold - the ruined chapel is still visible - and is surrounded by a 300-year-old olive grove and, blissfully, very little else. The hotel has 52 rooms, six villas, an infinity pool, two restaurants and a Mad Menesque bar. The spa is exceptional using advanced products by Sisley, that smell and feel rather amazing. chateau-st-martin.com



O1
The chateau's hilltop aspect

**02** Inside Spa Saint-Martin Sisley



## The treatment

The signature "Exceptional Ritual for Face and Body" comprises over two hours of rejuvenating treatments that will leave you ready to face the day's important issues, such as which sun lounger to pick, and when to take your next nap.

### Why it's great for men

What's for dinner? A fillet steak and bottle of red on the terrace of Restaurant Le Saint-Martin overlooking the Cap d'Antibes. Merci beaucoup.

## 4 of 6 THE CULTURAL ONE

Embrace the most beautiful city in the world from the comfort of your massage bed

Though Venice may not be the first destination you'd consider for a relaxing break, the new Acqua di Parma spa at The Gritti Palace should send it to the top of your list. Originally commissioned as a grand family home in 1475, it is one of the city's great institutions. Opposite the Basilica Santa Maria Della Sallute on the edge of the Grand Cabal and only five minutes from Piazza San Marco, it's the perfect base from which to explore the city. But a recent refurbishment means it's now also the perfect place to escape the bustling streets when it gets too much.

The Acqua di Parmamanaged Blu Mediterraneo Spa is appointed with Murano glass, wenge wood and precious marble, and features a space dedicated to footbaths (for all those cobble-tired feet), a pair of Turkish baths and treatment suites with space for two. If you go for the hour-long gentleman's facial, though, we wouldn't blame you for wanting the room all to yourself. acquadiparma.com/spa



O1
The Hotel Gritti
Palace, Venice

The hotel's luxurious Acquadi Parma spa





#### The treatment

The crowning glory is the Blu Mediterraneo Spa Signature Massage, a treatment of ultimate relaxation, thanks partly to the beguiling scent of Acqua di Parma products, of which there is an abundant array to choose from. The perfect remedy for a tough day navigating the cobbles of La Serenissima.

#### Why it's great for men

With one of the most comprehensive men-only treatment menus this side of the Adriatic, it's a no-brainer.



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Introducing the Ever Us two-stone diamond ring.



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## ERNEST JONES

LOVE & LIFE

ernestjones.co.uk



Founded in 1988 by Indonesian hotelier Adrian Zecha, the Aman boutique hotel concept, which now stands at 30 resorts worldwide, was groundbreaking at a time when resorts usually featured 500 rooms or more. Amangiri, set in 600 acres of ancient Navajo desertscape in Utah, USA, has just 34. Derived from the Sanskrit word for "peaceful mountain", Amangiri really is a tranquil and remote hideaway from hectic city life, albeit against a backdrop of the most breathtaking terrain.

A civilised 25-minute drive from Paige airport (or 2.5 hours if you arrive from St George), the welcome is warm and personal. Rooms are all suites with varying levels of luxury. Our desert view suite – all white stone floors and neutral timbers – came with an enormous, walkaround bed, double rain-showers plus tub, and a private terrace with a light your own fireplace, which threw magical light into the room as the sun set over the nearby mountain range.

Bigger suites have their own plunge pool but the hotel's piece de resistance is surely the magnificent swimming pool cut around an enormous rock that looms out of the escarpment next to the dining area.

aman.com/resorts/amangiri



#### The treatment

We headed to the impressive water pavilion which houses a modernist steam room, plunge pool and dry sauna with a yoga studio next door. A relaxing 30-minute float tank experience (salty and dark) was followed by a deep tissue massage — with another spectacular view to the rockscape just 20m away — and then a free candlelight yoga session to stretch muscles weary from travelling.

## Why it's great for men

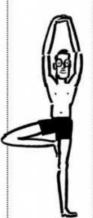
Far from sitting around in dressing gowns, the best thing about Amangiri is the abundance of activities on offer in and around the hotel. After a strenuous morning spent climbing the rocky Hoodoo Via Ferrata trail (actual rock climbing, so be warned), we spent the following morning in a high-energy, complimentary pilates class with the playful Connie – nicknamed The Mistress of Fitness.

The resort's contemporary stone design blends with the desert-scape

**02** Spa step pool

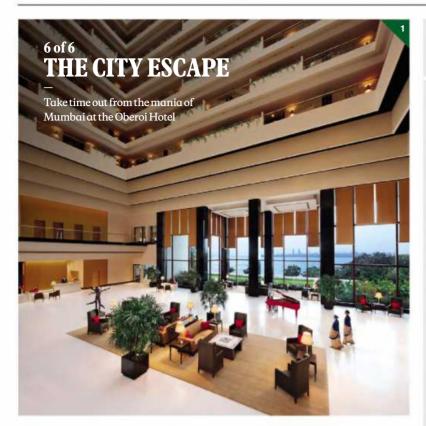
**03**View out from a bathroom

O4
Hot pool built into the rocks









If you've ever been to Mumbai - or anywhere else in India - you'll know that to fully enjoy the remarkable culture, incomparable architecture and stunning surroundings, you need to embrace the chaos. A charming chaos, absolutely - but chaos nonetheless. Once you've made a jaunt to the Gateway of India monument and slurped a lassi on Chowpatty Beach, head along Marine Drive to the Oberoi Hotel - a marble-clad haven of calm in the manic metropolis - for a cleansing indigenous treatment in the hotel's sprawling spa (and a cheeky gin and tonic after) oberoihotels.com

#### 01

The hotel's huge waterside lobby

#### 02

A deluxe suite at Oberoi Mumbai



## The treatment

Try the Journey to India treatment, a 2.5-hour sensory experience incorporating traditional Ayurvedic methods with an Indian foot and head massage — perfect when you've been jostled by the crowds on the city streets all day.

### Why it's great for men

We all love a targeted treatment that actually does something, and the nature of Ayurvedic massage is that it's designed to target specific issues in the body such as poor digestion, reduced circulation or tired skin.



## Or, if you'd prefer something a little closer to home...



## Claridge's, London The Sisley spa at this historic hotel is second to none

Set atop the hotel, its calm belies its Central London site. Rooms are well appointed, therapists are knowledgeable and discreet, and treatments, from grooming brand Sisley, are very relaxing. The treatment: Ecological Facial for Men: a gentle exfoliation to avoid breakouts, and lashings of Sisley's intensely nourishing products. Ideal before a night out. claridges.co.uk



## Corinthia, London Housing an enormous spa – one of the capital's finest

Espa Life now offers the Whisky and Wet Shave — a haircut, wet shave, manicure, eyebrow shaping and use of the Movie Makeover Room, a separate, secret salon supposedly kept for visiting

music and movie types, with all state-of-the-art mod cons. The Treatment: The new Medical Massage, which identifies health problems, then treats them holistically. espalifeatcorinthia.com



### Soho Farmhouse, Oxfordshire Book a long weekend in a big country house

Nestled in 100 acres of countryside near Chipping Norton, the Farmhouse is close enough to London to make it an easy post-work escape, but far enough away to make you feel fully cut off. The Treatment: Visit the Cowshed spa for a scrub, soak and massage — then go boating on the lake. sohofarmhouse.com



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# Your month in menswear

Fight frost with winter wool, ultimate wellingtons, a snow watch and more

## 01 Timberland

Stylish winter insulation

,

The cold is here and those lightweight sneakers you've worn all summer aren't cutting it anymore. Timberland to the rescue. Its Winter Wool Collection has been made in conjunction with foul-weather-gear icons Pendleton and Harris Tweed, so it's all well-made and robust. The shawl-collared Traveler mountain field jacket (pictured), is cut from hardy lambs' wool (with a Pendleton plaid lining), while the tough denim 32-litre backpack is waterproof and stain-resistant. The superlative stoutness continues in the boots, shirts, trousers and knitwear completing the collection. Whatever you've got planned for the soggy season, Timberland's new kit can conquer it. From £80, timberlandonline.co.uk



Hand-painted works of art

Handmade is one thing, but handpainted? We know Etro's A/W '15 collection is full of beguiling textures (think gold-dusted velvet suits and 3D needle-stitched coats), but the Italian brand has now included a series of handpainted designs, such as this jacket. Created in a near-forgotten - but now revived - workshop/ studio in Como, Italy, each piece is carefully produced by one artist per garment, who paints tone-on-tone layers onto jackets in corduroy and velvet, plus T-shirts and ties. It's ideal armour for the party season. £1,770, etro.com



## 03 Muck Boots

Wicked winter wellies

/

While Timberland's new collection offers robust streetwear, the Original Muck Boot Company creates its wares with outstanding outdoor functionality at the fore. Hugely successful in the US, its boots, such as the Edgewater II, below, are comfortable, warm and, as they're made from 5mm neoprene, waterproof. Inside, its XpressCool technology pulls moisture away from the skin and an anti-friction sock liner offers breathable, anti-microbial protection. Whether you're hiking, working or commuting, save your best leather footwear and tackle the mud and slush in high-performance Muck Boots. £100, muckbootcompany.com





04 Swatch

Jeremy Jones's snowboarding watch

Winter's here and the mountains are calling. You've got your board, kit, boots, helmet, gloves and heads-up display goggles. But do you have a snowboarding watch? Swatch has teamed up with Jeremy Jones — an icon of the sport and a principal name in big-mountain riding — for this limited edition, mountainside-orientated chronograph. Of the project, Jones says: "My goal was to create a reliable, classic adventure watch. I have a ton of respect for the history of Swatch, and now to be a part of it is really exciting." The Jeremy Jones Watch is limited to 150 pieces. £120, swatch.com





# VAUXHALLADAM EVELY onés an original

Official Government Test Environmental Data. Fuel consumption figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (g/km). ADAM S 1.4i 150PS Turbo: Urban: Car shown is ADAM S 1.4i 150PS Turbo in I'll be Black with Red n Roll roof colour pack and Morrocana Recaro seats.



Design your very own unique ADAM from a palette of 19 body colours, 7 roof and mirror colours and 25 alloy wheels. There's no end of combinations of exterior and interior accessories and trims, and hi-tech gizmos galore. Go create at Vauxhall.co.uk/ADAM





## THE LIST

## Marcus Wareing

The two-Michelin-starred chef, Hollywood movie consultant and *MasterChef* judge devises a menu of his favourite things

### 1/Food and drink

Wine Burgundy, white and red.

Spirit Belvedere vodka.

Beer Peroni.

Dish Roast.

Snack Chocolate biscuit.

Restaurant Chez Bruce, Wandsworth.

Bar The Gilbert Scott, St Pancras.

## 2/Style

Jeans Ted Baker.

Shirt Hackett.

**Scarf Paul Smith** 

**Shoes** Oliver Sweeney. **Socks** Richard James.

Suit Hackett.

Tuxedo Gieves & Hawkes.

Hat Baseball cap.

## 3 / Technology

Phone iPhone.

Tablet iPad.

Laptop I don't have one.

Camera iPhone.

Sound system Sonos.

Car Jaguar F-Type.

Bike Moped.



## 4 / Travel

Hometown Southport, England.
Destination South of France.
Hotel Reethi Rah resort, Maldives.
Shop Any good food shop.

## 5 / People

 $\textbf{Style icon} \, \mathsf{Tom} \, \mathsf{Ford}.$ 

Fictional icon Muttley from Wacky Races.

Artist Tristan Eaton.

Musician Adele.

**Film star** Bradley Cooper, I just worked with him on the chef movie *Burnt*, and he is amazing.



## 6 / Grooming

Cologne Hugo by Hugo Boss.
Toothpaste Sensodyne.
Shaving foam I don't shave, I trim.
Moisturiser Kiehl's Facial Fuel.
Shower gel Molton Brown.
Face wash Water.
Shampoo Whatever the
wife has in the shower.
Hair product Bed Head.

**Barber** Gentlemen's Tonic, Mayfair, London.



## 7 / Tools

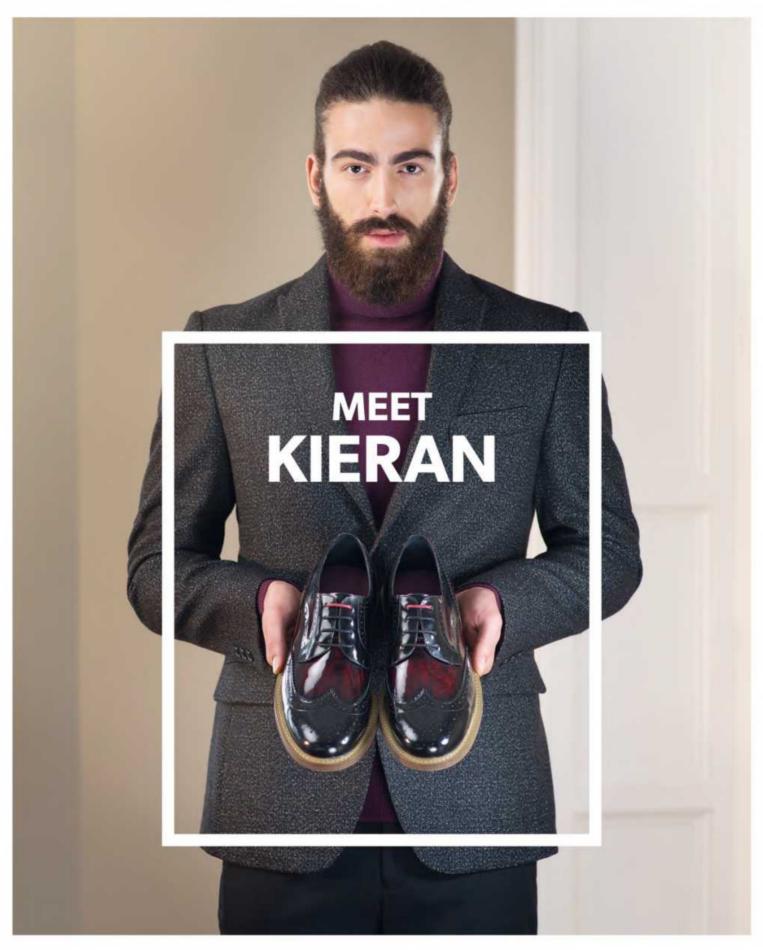
Watch Omega Speedmaster.
Pen Montblanc Meisterstück.
Knife Vintage Victorinox.
App Spotify.
Website Google.
Gadget Bottle opener.

#### 8 / Home

Chair Chesterfield.

Pet Cocker spaniel.











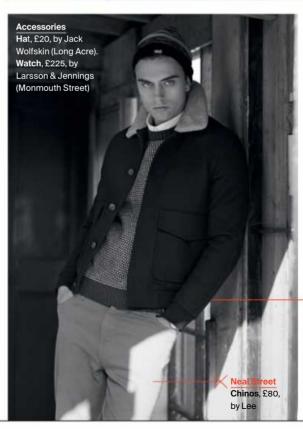


Neal Street
Socks, £8, by Happy
Socks. Trainers,
£45, by Superga.
Chinos, £75, by Lee

→ To riff on the famous quote by Benjamin Franklin, one of the few things that's certain in life is... Christmas shopping. Like the great festival it celebrates, it comes round every year. And if you follow our advice, 2015 will bring another certainty: not just stress-free, but fun — and discounted — Christmas shopping.

This year there is an easy and enjoyable way to ticking off your list early: the Seven Dials and St Martin's Courtyard Christmas Shopping Event, which promises 20 per cent off at more than 100 of the area's shops, grooming brands, bars and restaurants.

For one evening only, on 3 December from 5-9pm, this cobbled quarter in the heart of London's West End will close to traffic and turn on the festive cheer. As well as 20 per cent off at many of your favourite stores including Barbour, Farah, Natural Selection, Carhartt, Fred Perry and Cos - you'll enjoy DJ sets, live bands, free drinks, an Esquire Style talk and giveaways on the night. All you have to do is register online today for your access-all-areas ticket. Go to sevendials.co.uk or stmartinscourtyard.co.uk to find out more, register, sign up for exclusive offers and browse new A/W'15 fashion.



## Sign up → to enter £1,000 draw

Register for your free ticket to Seven Dials and St Martin's Courtyard's Christmas Shopping Event on Thursday, 3 December (5-9pm) and you could win a £1,000 voucher to spend in the area's shops. Sign up online and view the full list of over 100 participating outlets and restaurants.

Earlham Street
Coat, £159, by Peter
Werth. Sweater,
£110, by Finisterre.
Shirt, £75, by
Carhartt

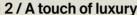
## The gift list

Discover superior Christmas gift-buying with Esquire's selected shops at Seven Dials and St Martin's Courtyard WC2H

## 1/The man bag

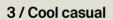
For leather goods, you'd be hard pressed to beat British heritage brand Brooks England and its Seven Dials store, B1866, For an investment that'll look great and last a generation, this is the spot. Don't go past the Barbican messenger bag, £235.





We'd say this is a great choice for your father, but honestly, once you walk in the door of Murdock's central London headquarters it'll be difficult to resist the on-point range of grooming products, from shaving creams to razors. Vetiver cologne. £70, Shave Cream, £34, Napier scented candle, £35.

Shop Murdock, 18 Monmouth Street



Your skating days might have been abandoned with that nasty spill you took in '05, but the future of the sport is right here, at the Element shop. Roll by for everything from threads to decks. We'll start with this bold Berry jumper, £60, please. Shop Element, 13 Shorts Gardens



## 4 / The weekender

Add continental style to your Christmas list with Spanish menswear brand Fl Ganso Founded in 2004, it has quickly made its mark with original pieces from jackets and shirts to shoes This denim shirt, £55, and leather jacket, £250, combo is a winner. Shop El Ganso, 27 Neal Street

## 5 / Power grooming ->

Even the most dedicated shopper needs a bit of R'n'R afterwards Kiehl's will take care of all your grooming needs - you might even pick up something for the father-in-law, too. We stand by Kiehl's Facial Fuel moisturiser with SPF15, £33, Facial Fuel face wash, £17.50, and the anti-ageing Facial Fuel moisturiser, £38

Shop Kiehl's, 29 Monmouth Street





From street food to be poke customisation and Esquire editor Q&As - Seven Dials and St Martin's Courtyard's Christmas Shopping Event has it all

→ If a 20 per cent discount at over 100 outlets isn't enough incentive to visit the Seven Dials and St Martin's Courtyard Christmas Shopping Event, there's plenty of in-store activity as well.

Kick things off at Christys' Hats live DJ set, or head to Cambridge Satchel Men's for bag customisation and a "How to look after your leather" workshop. Superga will have "shoe artists" on hand to customise your footwear right there and then. Miller Harris will happily help you find your perfect scent, before heading to G-Star for a chance to win a £300 shopping voucher.

Need a refuel? Hit Vico or perhaps La Bottega for cold meats, cheese boards and speciality Parma ham. To drink, grab free Cornish beer at Finisterre or mulled wine at Natural Selection. Sassoon will also be getting in on the action with some complimentary mince pies and goodie bags, while at Laura Lee free mulled cider will be served

The unmissable main event, of course, will be the trend talk from Esquire Style Director Teo van den Broeke, who'll be offering advice and tips on all of your festive sartorial conundrums.

Register for your free event ticket at sevendials.co.uk or stmartinscourtyard.co.uk and you could win £1,000 to spend in the area. For even more prizes, share your photos on the night with #SevenDials and #ShoppingEvent.

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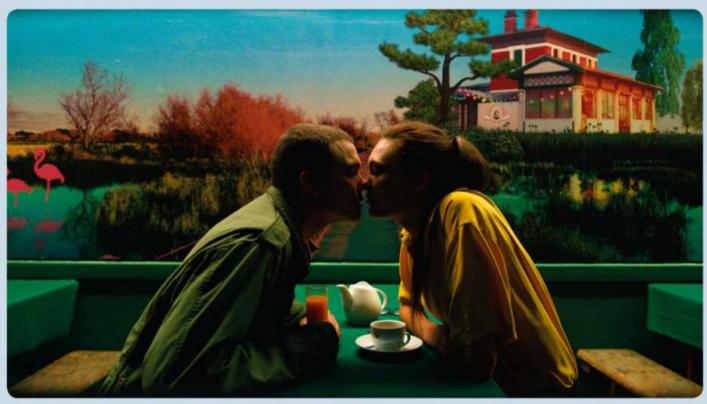
# Culture

FILM / MUSIC / BOOKS / TELEVISION / ART





Truly, madly, deeply: Love follows the sex life of infatuated pair Murphy (Karl Glusman) and Electra (Aomi Muyock)



 $\rightarrow$  It may be called *Love* but the real topic of director Gaspar Noé's new film is sex: two whole, sometimes enjoyable, sometimes uncomfortable hours of it. Through the recollections of Murphy (Karl Glusman), an American student in Paris pining for Electra (Aomi Muyock), the French woman he lost, we see bonking in its many guises: tentative early love sex, full-throttle infatuation sex, spiteful break-up sex. Sex between a man and a woman, sex between a man and two women, sex between a man and woman and a transsexual, sex between groups of strangers in a sex club. At one point we're treated to a face-to-face - or should that be head-to-head? — point of view shot of a (reportedly real) penis ejaculating out from the screen onto the audience. Did we mention it is in 3D?

Even still, it says something about Noé's films that *Love* represents something of a mellowing for the Argentinian. Previous efforts include 2002's rape-revenge drama *Irreversible*—considered by many upon its

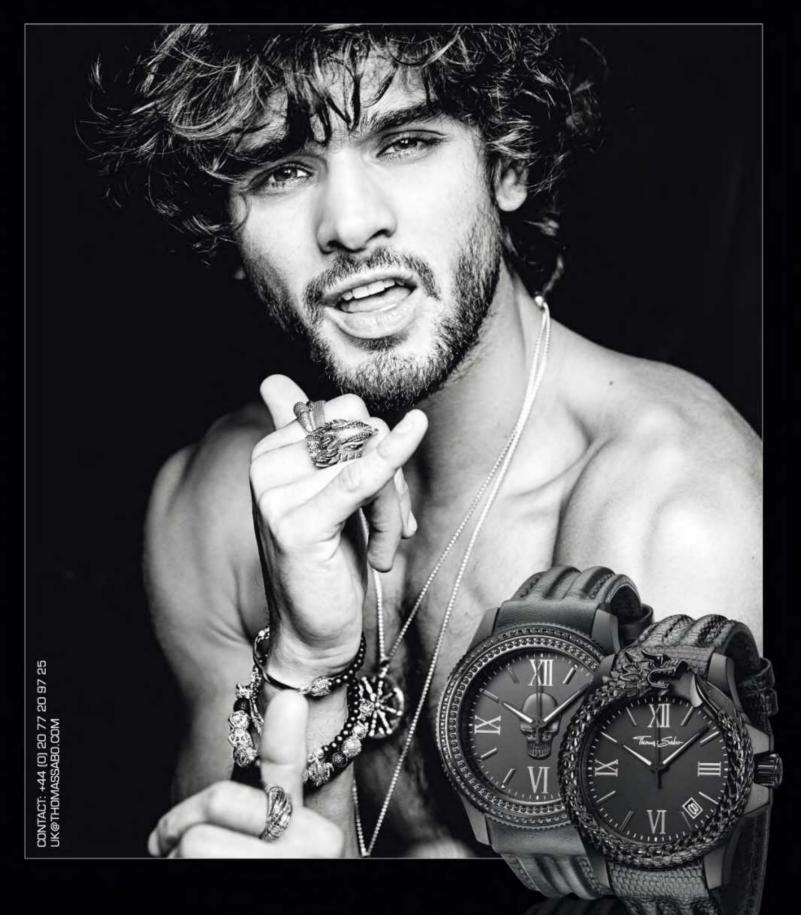
# We see tentative early love sex, infatuation sex and spiteful break-up sex. Did we mention that it is in 3D?

release to be the most shocking film ever made, a dubious honour to which it still has some claim — and 2009's equally deranged if less headline-grabbing family drama *Into The Void*. Compared to those, *Love* feels as shocking as watching a vintage porn flick (cheesy soundtrack included).

So why bother seeing it? Well, unless you're 13 and your modem is broken, it's not for the writhing bodies — though the cast, particularly Swiss model and debutant Muyock, are of course uniformly gorgeous. The really interesting stuff here is when Noé explores the emotional crucible of sexual jealousy and sometimes-blurred line between fantasy and true desire. Murphy

and Electra embark on a journey together that breaches frontier after frontier, but rather than bring them closer together, it slowly tears them apart. More could have been made of this, but you feel it would have got in the way of Noé's stated main aim: to make a film that celebrates sex in a joyous way, or as he put it at Cannes, "gives guys a hard-on and makes girls cry". Whether it achieves that aim we'll leave for you to figure out (and keep to yourself), but beyond the titillation, there's just about enough in this self-indulgent but, yes, joyous film to justify a cinema trip. Just don't take a first date.

Love is out on 20 November



## Thomas Sabo

REBEL AT HEART

WWW.THOMASSABO.COM

Neighbourhood watch: Toby Jones plays a banker in Capital, in which a mysterious spy gives one London street a new-found sense of community

### City limits

#### NEW BBC DRAMA CAPITAL CAPTURES THE REAL LONDON — UP TO A POINT

It's unlikely that Boris Johnson will seek to use *Capital*, the new BBC drama adapted from the novel of the same name by erstwhile *Esquire* writer John Lanchester, as pro-London marketing material. This is the city that will seem somewhat familiar to those who live in it, with house prices rocketing to insanity, cultures and classes rubbing up against each other harmoniously and otherwise, and everybody scratching round for that elusive something — more space? More money? More artisanal coffee shops? — that will finally, decisively, make them happy.

Adapted for TV by Peter Bowker, who previously penned David Tennant drama *Blackpool*, *Capital* focuses on the residents of a single fictional street, the oh-so-subtly named Pepys Road in Clapham, who are drawn out of their typical London solipsism when they start receiving mysterious

postcards stating, "We want what you have".

Though they dismiss them at first as some kind of sales bumf, when the postcards start to feature photographs of their houses and families, things start to feel decidedly more sinister. So who is lurking in these million-pound-and-then-some properties on Pepys Road? Well, let's just call it an eclectic mix: they include a Polish builder (Radoslaw Kaim), an English investment banker (Toby Jones), a Zimbabwean illegal immigrant working as a traffic warden (Wunmi Mosaku), a Bangladeshi corner shop owner (Adeel Akhtar) and an elderly English widow (Gemma Jones) who was born in the house in which she still lives (for now anyway, given that in the first episode she's told she's got a brain tumour).

The dramatic tension comes not so much from the mysterious messages, but from the

characters coming into each other's orbits and having the kinds of conversations that Londoners almost never have — the banker's wife pops into the corner shop for the first time and is stunned to be offered some fresh coriander from the owner's own supply and for free; the traffic warden's boyfriend has a chance encounter with the banker on a bench ("What do you have to be afraid of? You are safe, healthy and rich." "I wouldn't go that far; not by London standards." "But by Zimbabwe standards perhaps..." etc).

If the characters seem tokenistic at first, there are at least three hour-long episodes in which nuances can emerge, and some of the interactions can become more plausible. Capital is a peep — nay, a Pepys! — at a London we almost know, if not quite.

Capital starts in November on BBC One



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Driven mad: Steve McQueen, below, with co-star Elga Andersen and director Lee H Katzin on the set of pet project Le Mans, 1970

## American ego

A NEW STEVE MCQUEEN DOC EXPOSES THE PITFALLS OF VANITY PROJECTS

In June 1970, filming began on *Le Mans* starring Steve McQueen, fresh off the back of 1968's *Bullitt*, and produced by his new company, Solar Productions. It would capture the essence of motor racing — McQueen's passion — in a film set at the famous 24-hour race in France. The project had one small fault: there was no script. But hey, *The Great Escape* was made the same way apparently, and, you know, it was Steve McQueen.

Gabriel Clarke and John McKenna's feature-length documentary, Steve McQueen: The Man & Le Mans (a subtitle both irresistible and a little toe-curling) shows what can happen when an actor is given more creative control than is good for him, or for anybody else involved. Le Mans was going to be McQueen's baby, to "show why a man races" to an audience who didn't have the disposable income, or the down time, to race Porsches for a hobby. From the start the production was shaky. Beyond the matter of no script — something the film mentions, ooh, 27-or-so times — there were squabbles with the director and studio, blown budgets, ignored schedules, bad accidents (one driver had a leg amputated) and McQueen's dissolving marriage (not helped by his rampant philandering; one associate interviewed said he was sleeping with around a dozen women a week, or as he helpfully breaks it down, "a little less than two a day"). Of course, it's humanising to see that icons can have existential crises, too.

Stevan Riley's recent documentary, Listen To Me Marlon, made a sympathetic case for Marlon Brando's much-ridiculed social activism as a genuine attempt to make a difference to the world. McQueen, if one is being harsh, is less immediately winning. "You like speed, don't you?" asks a journalist. "It's nice," he replies. His first wife, Neile,





remembers his opening chat-up line. "Hi. You're pretty." (It was, at least, effective.) Also, as altruistic acts go, showing people how fun motor racing can be is arguably not at the top of the list. How you feel about Steve McQueen: The Man & Le Mans will depend on how much you share his interest in fast cars. Admittedly the footage shot (approximately a million feet) is gloriously rich and thrilling; the theninnovative filming techniques included fixing cameras to a car competing in the 1970 Le

Mans race to capture the action at 240mph. And there was certainly genuine feeling on McQueen's side, as the film's somewhatfawning talking heads attest.

As vanity projects go, Le Mans was certainly not the most worthy, but damn it if it doesn't make your heart race a little bit faster. And, you know, it was Steve McQueen.

Steve McQueen: The Man  $\delta$  Le Mans is out on 20 November

## RAYMOND WEIL

GENEVE



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Special Edition - freelancer

4

Jack of all trades: Master of None is another eclectic Aziz Ansari project, loosely based on his sort-of autobiography Modern Romance, and stars his actual mum and dad

# Who's a pretty polymath?

MASTER OF NONE IS YET ANOTHER FEATHER IN AZIZ ANSARI'S CAP

We mention Aziz Ansari in these pages a lot. But tell him to stop making good stuff and we'll stop. As well as the stint on cult US sitcom *Parks and Recreation* that made his name, he's got his stand-up comedy career, he wrote a quasi-scientific book about dating, and now he has a new Netflix show that he's written, produced, directed and stars in, alongside a smattering of neatly played celeb cameos including Claire Danes and Busta Rhymes. What are we supposed to do?

Master of None is a series of short films featuring Ansari as Dev. But it works as an excuse for him and his friends — including co-writer Alan Yang and comedian Lena Waithe — to riff about issues affecting them such as immigrant parents, precious actors and cultural racism. This is smart, witty writing by a smart, witty guy. Same time next month, Aziz?

Master of None will be available on Netflix from 6 November



#### Points of interest

MEET FLOATING POINTS, YOUR NEW FAVOURITE MUSICAL BOFFIN



There's Dan Snaith, aka Caribou, who has a PhD in maths; there's Dr Brian Cox and his flirtation with New-Labour-promoting dance-pop; and there's Brian May who finally finished his PhD in astrophysics in 2007, a mere 30-odd years after he started it (the small matter of Queen got in the way). Really, who doesn't love a musical brainbox?

Now we have one more, Sam Shepherd, aka Floating Points, a highly respected

musician/inventor/DJ releasing his debut album this month, while also working on his neuroscience doctorate. And you thought you were clever for putting your trousers on the right way round this morning.

Elaenia (named for a bird in the tyrant flycatcher family), is as probing and exciting a record as you'd hope for from the Manchester-born Shepherd. It draws on his background as a student of classical music

and jazz and as a devotee of obscure synthesisers, yet it sacrifices nothing by way of listenability (that's a word, right?).

There are feathery breakbeats, gentle Brazilian jazz-funk, and cavernous, string-rich sonic soundscapes (it had to be said). Truly, *Elaenia* is a record that will expand your mind as it lifts your spirits.

Elaenia (Pluto) is out on 6 November

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### FROM THE PEOPLE BEHIND BRITAIN'S MOST STYLISH AND SOPHISTICATED MEN'S MAGAZINE

## Esquire

# The big watch book



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6

Emilia Clarke plays Daenerys Targaryen in HBO's Game of Thrones. Her appeal is less complicated than her character's name

### Thrones star wears the crown

HARD TO DISAGREE WITH OUR AMERICAN BROTHERS' CHOICE FOR 2015'S SEXIEST WOMAN ALIVE



It's an ancient and noble tradition that stretches all the way back to a dark and mystical time pre-Snapchat, pre-CrossFit and long before North West was even a glint in Kris Jenner's eye. Yep, we're talking 2004. Each year since then, American Esquire's Sexiest Woman Alive has celebrated just that: the female being our transatlantic brother magazine considers to be the most

eye-poppingly gorgeous currently walking the Earth. The inaugural winner was Angelina Jolie and subsequent honorees have included no lesser *bella figuras* than Charlize Theron (2007), Rihanna (2011), Penelope Cruz (2014), and — two times! — Scarlett Johannson (2006 and 2013). (Someone called Minka Kelly won in 2010. We've seen the pictures. The decision

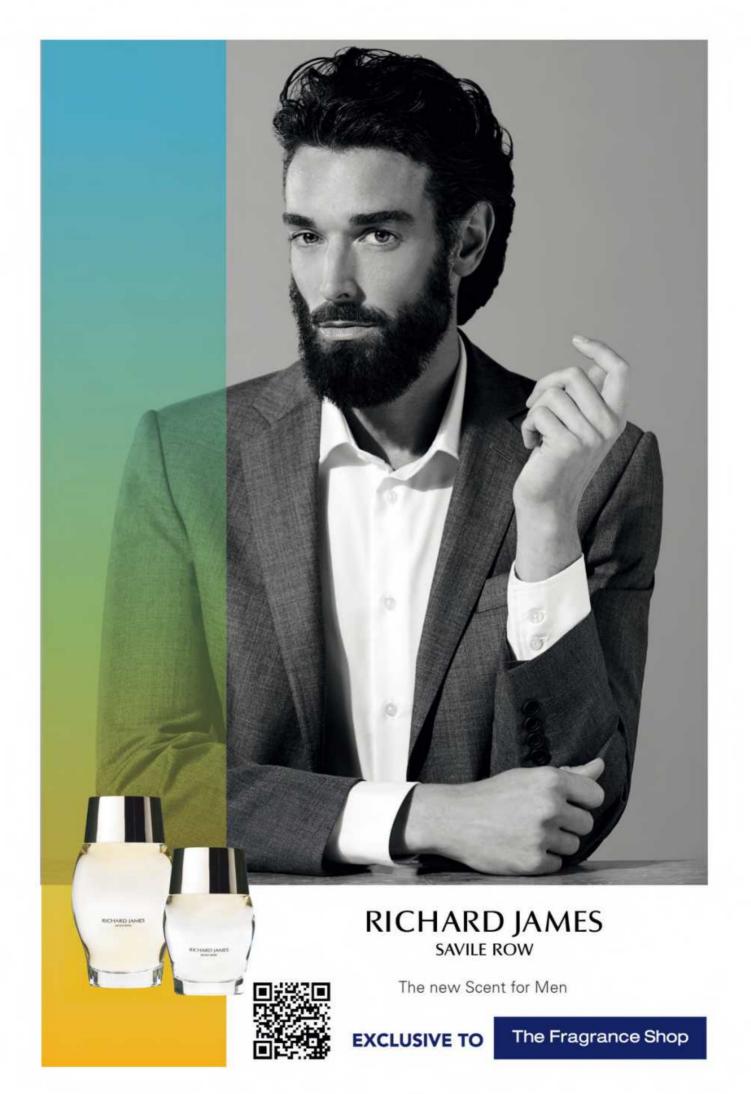
stands.) This year's winner, familiar to fans of the little-seen cult TV show *Game of Thrones*, is Emilia Clarke, 28, from London. Clarke is not the first Brit to be *Esquire*'s Sexiest Woman Alive — that was Kate Beckinsale (2009) — but she's the only one who combines the role with being Mother of Dragons. Unless there's something Halle Berry (2008) hasn't been telling us...

Emilia Clarke, the Sexiest Woman Alive in 2015 as decreed by our opposite numbers at US Esquire, photographed by Vincent Peters Body suit by Fleur du Mal. Shoes by Christian Louboutin. Bracelet by Bulgari





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Esquire Culture

Cold comfort: Vyacheslav Korotki walks to an abandoned lighthouse in Khodovarikha, Russia, to gather firewood. Bottom, more scenes from life in the bitter Russian Arctic





#### Korotki attempts to preserve his sanity while recording snowfall, temperature and wind in isolated northwest Russia









# Lonely at the top

PHOTOGRAPHER EVGENIA ARBUGAEVA CAPTURES THE WORLD'S MOST DESOLATE JOB

Vyacheslav Korotki is a weather man, but not the kind we're used to. He's a polyarnik, meaning he specialises in the Polar North, a skill-set that led him to accept a job in the Arctic station in Khodovarikha, a remote outpost and lighthouse on the coast of the Pechora Sea in northwest Russia. There, his regime was photographed by Evgenia Arbugaeva, whose work will be shown at the Print Sales Gallery of The Photographers' Gallery in London.

The 64-year-old's duties include measuring snowfall, wind and temperature — every three hours, day and night — and trying to preserve his sanity in a place of isolation. The nearest town is an hour's helicopter flight away and his wife lives in the regional capital of Arkhangelsk. Arbugaeva used to visit a meteorological station near her home with her father, where they'd chat to "kind meteorologists with long beards who treated us to tea and cloudberry jam, telling us stories about how the Aurora forms," she tells Esquire.

In 2013, she visited weather stations to rekindle this memory, but found they were modernised; it wasn't until she arrived in Khodovarikha and met Korotki, with his "wild grey curls and calm blue eyes with a note of sadness" that she knew she'd found her man. After 13 years in Khodovarikha, Korotki is supposed to be retiring and returning to civilization in Arkhangelsk. But he can't quite do it. "He has been training up two meteorologists to replace him, but he's still there," Arbugaeva says. "He keeps putting off retirement. I think he doesn't want to come back to the real world."

From 6 November to 16 January 2016 at The Photographers' Gallery, London; thephotographersgallery.org.uk

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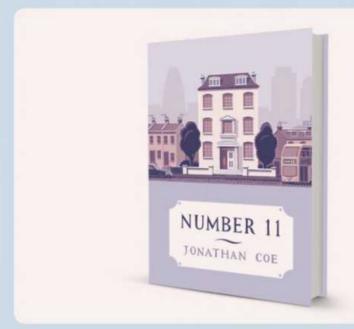
Poll axed: Number II features characters from Coe's earlier book What a Carve Up, a satire of the Thatcher and Major governments

## What a follow-up!

JONATHAN COE'S NEW NOVEL COVERS FAMILIAR GROUND

As a novelist, it must be frustrating to be pinned down to your popular early works, even when you may feel you've moved on to greater things. Of course, as a novelist it's also nice when people really like anything you've done, so perhaps it's not such a travesty to give them, when the occasion demands, just a little bit more of the good stuff. It's possible this was what led Jonathan Coe to revisit some of the characters and themes from his beloved fourth novel What a Carve Up! (1994) - a satirical account of a family of odiously aspirational toffs in Thatcherite Britain and during the first Gulf War — in his newest novel, Number 11 (his eleventh, as it in-no-way-accidentally happens).

The book is in five parts loosely connected by the number in the title — it is applied to bus routes, basement conversions and, of course, a Downing Street residence — and by recurring characters, though Coe doesn't deny himself some stylistic variety. There's a tale of two young girls who encounter a mysterious "bird lady" (and What a Carve Up! cameo) at a gothic tower;



a widowed academic's account to a student about the online search for an obscure film that drove her late husband to nearmadness; and a washed-up pop star's experience of trauma in the jungle on a thinly veiled version of I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here.

These are thoughtful, wistful pieces and somewhat light on laughs, but in the fourth section, "The Winshaw Prize", Coe's satirical arrow finds its target. The story of a hopelessly self-aggrandising junior

detective's attempts to solve the murders of two stand-up comedians morphs into a savage skewering of the media, the entertainment industry and 21st-century satire itself. That the Winshaw Prize was created by the family at the heart of What a Carve Up!, whose malign influence seems to have dwindled little in the two decades since they were introduced, is a nod to the new novel's own gilded lineage.

Number II (Viking) is out on II November

#### Kid rock

BILL RYDER-JONES'S EXCELLENT NEW ALBUM IS NOT THAT KIND OF BEDROOM MUSIC...



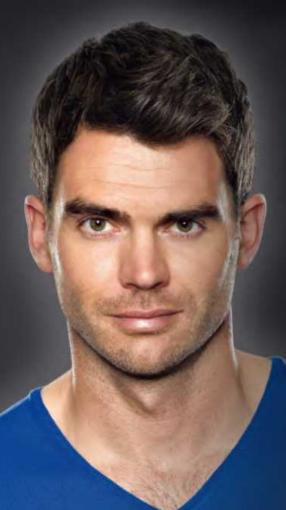
It's common for young musicians to beaver away in their bedrooms experimenting with guitars and musical software (among other activities), before graduating to proper big-boys' studios once their careers take off. What's less common is the route that Bill Ryder-Jones has taken for his new album, West Kirby County Primary, which has seen him return to his bedroom in his mum's house in West Kirby on the Wirral, to write and record IO tracks of Io-fi

alt-rock, before polishing them up at Parr Street Studios in Liverpool.

These aren't adolescent musical fumblings for Ryder-Jones — for a start he's 32 — as he's already experienced success as a guitarist with The Coral, and as a solo artist. He's even got an ambitious concept album out of his system: 20II's well-received If, an orchestral response to Italo Calvino's experimental 1979 novel If on a Winter's Night a Traveller. All of which seems to

have cleared the pipes for Ryder-Jones to make a confident third record that doesn't break boundaries but does deliver earthy, guitar-driven, sleepy rock — with a hint of Elliott Smith, albeit with a Scouse accent — that deserves a bigger audience than a half-finished Airfix and a torn Graeme Sharp poster.

West Kirby County Primary (Domino) is out on 6 November



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Tour de Force: Ahead of his Star Wars role, Domhnall Gleeson plays Jim Farrell opposite Oscar-nominee Saoirse Ronan in Brooklyn

### Dom dom dom, dom di-dom, dom di-dom

RISING TALENT DOMHNALL GLEESON HAS A LITTLE SPACE OPERA FILM OUT SOON, BUT FIRST UP: BROOKLYN



This month, Domhnall Gleeson stars as Saoirse Ronan's would-be lover in John Crowley's film adaptation of the acclaimed Colm Tóibín novel *Brooklyn*. It should spark a big winter for the former Harry Potter actor with roles in both *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*— as the villainous General Hux— and alongside Tom Hardy and Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Revenant*. Nice work if you can get it, and the Dublin-born 32-year-old most certainly can.

ESQUIRE: We'd like to point out that we haven't said you're Brendan Gleeson's son. DOMHNALL GLEESON: I've never felt penned in by that. I'm proud of my father

and his work, so I'm happy whenever anybody associates us. I feel very lucky. ESQ: You went toe-to-toe with him in John Michael McDonagh's Calvary last year. Was there any on-set rivalry? DG: It was a huge moment. On most things, I'd follow dad's lead but I think my job was not to do that. It wasn't friendly and didn't feel like father and son — it was nice having a normal Sunday dinner the week after. ESQ: You've played Englishmen and Americans - was it a nice change using your own Irish accent for Brooklyn? DG: That isn't my own accent! If you were from Ireland, you'd probably notice the difference. It was tougher than American

because it was such a tiny adjustment.

ESQ: Did you impart any acting wisdom
to your 21-year-old co-star Saoirse Ronan?
DG: To Oscar-nominee Saoirse Ronan?
Imagine: I'd sidle up to give her advice and she'd just take her nomination plaque out of her bag and say, "Maybe tell my friend?"
ESQ: You're in Star Wars: The Force
Awakens. Tell us something nobody else knows about it.

DG: Fuck it. I will...

**ESQ:** Did you get to wield a lightsaber? **DG:** Oh, I can't tell you *that*.

ESQ: Was it daunting being in the world's biggest film franchise?

DG: I'd had experience of populating an exceptionally popular world with Harry Potter [Gleeson played Ron Weasley's older brother, Bill]; you get excited and very nervous, but you have to leave that aside. Right before a take, the cameramen would shout, "Everybody, you're in Star Wars! Don't forget it!" and you're like, "Come on!" ESQ: Did you sneak any props home? DG: I thought about it, but all I could remember was one day leaving the Harry Potter set and noticing this massive tailback on the motorway — all because a wand had gone missing. They'd stopped traffic! You don't want to be that guy.

ESQ: Next year, you're in Alejandro González Iñárritu's fur-trapper revenge drama *The Revenant*. Plenty has been said about the tough filming conditions in the Rockies, but was it as bad as reported?

DG: That was the point; Alejandro wanted to push people, himself included. It was fun and difficult so that when we filmed we were in the right places mentally and physically. ESQ: You were in the weirdest film of 2014, *Frank*, alongside Michael Fassbender as singer Frank Sidebottom. Did you get to try the papier-mâché head on?

DG: My head was too big. I was devastated.

Brooklyn is out on 6 November

ombinall Gleeson words by Jacob Stolworthy

We can work it out: Jon Savage's new book, 1966, forensically examines the era when pop music quided a generation

## 1966 and all that

THE SWINGING SIXTIES' DEFINING YEAR INTERPRETED IN SONG

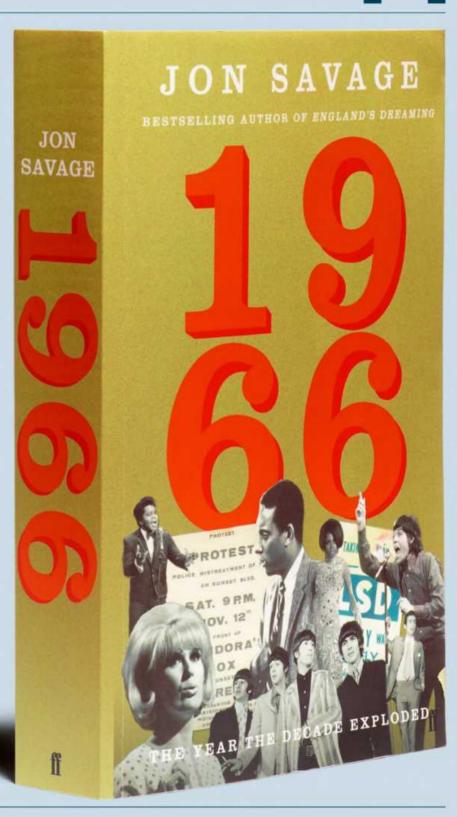
If a random survey was conducted in Britain asking, "What happened in 1966?", the majority of answers would surely hinge on a certain football match and its illustrious trophy. Not for cultural chronicler Jon Savage, who, in his erudite new book, remembers the year through its seminal pop music and the influence it had upon a rapidly changing world. In the pre-digital age, the pop scene was the core of post-war youth culture and the book addresses its importance from the perspective of those who created the hits and the millions of impressionable listeners affected and influenced by its messages.

In a decade already riven with tumultuous events—the '62 Cuban missile crisis; JFK's '63 assassination; Beatlemania in '64—Savage asserts that 1966 was the Sixties' tipping point, when all that had preceded it finally coalesced into new, freer ways of behaving and thinking, priming teens and young adults to overthrow the staid, redundant dictats of the older generation and its Establishment values.

Attributing 12 landmark 1966 songs to their month of release, Savage links them to social or political themes, eg, the rise of CND activism ("The Sound of Silence", Simon and Garfunkel); the Vietnam War ("The Ballad of the Green Berets", Barry Sadler); LSD ("The Third Eye", The Dovers); US ghetto riots ("Land of 1,000 Dances", Wilson Pickett), and so on. The case is expressively made that the era's wild soul, pop and r'n'b rollercoaster informed the challenges to political outlooks and fuelled revolutions in art, literature, film and fashion.

But, for all that desire to change the world, a glance at today's news — nuclear threats; interference in foreign wars; racial bigotry et al — soberingly confirms how many of the issues of 50 years ago remain with us, unsolved.

1966: the Year the Decade Exploded (Faber & Faber) is out on 19 November



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Families at war: a new film examines the effects of living with the repercussions of Nazi war criminals as parents

## Sins of the fathers

IN A NEW DOCUMENTARY, TWO SONS OF NAZIS CANNOT RECONCILE THEIR SHARED PAST

Niklas Frank and Horst von Wächter have a very unusual friendship. Both in their seventies, the two men share an uncommon heritage: Frank's father was Hans Frank, Nazi Governor-General of Poland; von Wächter's was Otto von Wächter, Frank's deputy and Governor of the Galicia District. But it is not this that brings them together: in fact, as David Evans' fascinating, thought-provoking new documentary shows, it seems likely that, ultimately, it will force them apart.

Frank, whose father was a cold authoritarian convinced for a time that Niklas was illegitimate, has no trouble denouncing his father as a criminal who was rightly hanged after being found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg Trials, the 70th anniversary of which is marked this month. "My father deserved to die," he says flatly.

Hans, however, whose childhood was

rosier, can't bring himself to tarnish his memories of his father, calling him "somebody who wanted to do something good," seeing him as a decent man forced to carry out the orders of a despicable regime. The pair's discussions make for fascinating eavesdropping, as they visit sites of Nazi atrocities with human rights lawyer Philippe Sands, whose own family were victims of

their fathers' deeds. Both Sands and an increasingly frustrated Frank want, perhaps need, von Wächter to accept his father's guilt. Horst, however, is a quietly stubborn opponent, and the small shift in perspective, when it comes, is perhaps not the one Sands, or indeed one of his subjects, was expecting.

My Nazi Legacy is out on 6 November



#### It's all about the bike

CYCLING FETISHISTS REJOICE! A REVOLUTIONARY DESIGN EXHIBITION IS EN ROUTE



Sometimes it's hard to tell if the cycling boom in the UK is really about taking to the hills and dales on your trusty two-wheeler to lift both soul and heart-rate, or if it's more about teetering about in a café in your cleats drinking 17 espressos with the odd lap of Regents Park in between. We're not sure if the latter group we'll call them Slipstreamers — is featured in the Design Museum in London's new show, Cycle Revolution, but they'll certainly number highly among the attendees. The exhibition is centred around four "tribes": High Performers, Urban Riders, Cargo Bikers and Thrill Seekers, many of

whom use their bicycles to achieve staggering speeds and cross dangerous terrain (not just Old Street roundabout). As well as Lycra-wetting examples of craftsmanship from manufacturers such as Pinarello and Brompton, there will be a recreation of a bicycle-making workshop and a section on the future of cycling and ideas about how to solve the motorist-pedestrian-cyclist conundrum. And no, thumbtacks isn't one of them.

Cycle Revolution runs from 18 November to 30 June, 2016, at The Design Museum, London SEI; designmuseum.org

## When the heat is on

#### The G-Shock Mudmaster is the only watch tough enough for America's bravest alpine firefighters

→ Nestled in the Methow Valley and surrounded by the alpine backdrop of the 500,000-acre North Cascades National Park lies the tiny town of Winthrop, Washington State. It's an untouched relic of America's Old West where, in 1883, prospectors arrived to search for gold. Its wooden sidewalks, hitching posts and saloons hint at its past, but its 400 current residents face the same threat to their livelihoods that first destroyed the town in 1893 — forest fires.

The pioneering spirit of Winthrop's early gold-rushers survived, however, and in 1939 the town became the first in the US to deploy smokejumpers. These small, elite teams have become the country's initial line of defence against wildfires, and parachute into the wilderness near flare-ups, before axes, chainsaws and crosscut saws are airdropped to them. Often enduring demanding 16-hour days and searing temperatures, the squads of between two to 20 men chop down trees in the fire's path to halt its spread. With accurate timekeeping, positioning and direction-finding the difference between life or death, North Cascades' jumpers trust the G-Shock GWG-1000 Mudmaster for their operations.

It's the only watch tough enough to survive the conditions. Gaskets where the crown meets the case surface and an airtight screw-lock structure stop mud and sawdust penetrating; its digital compass is vital to locate supplies; shock and vibration resistance mean it can be worn when operating chainsaws; and detailed readings on atmospheric pressure, temperature and altitude provide information on changes in weather.

It's also reliable enough to do the basics under pressure: solar power provides 23 months of continuous timekeeping; its mineral glass front and dual illuminator LED lighting ensure visibility even under the most extreme conditions, plus it weighs only 100g so it's comfortable to wear.

"Never Give Up" is G-Shock's philosophy and, since 1983, Casio's mission has been to use the latest technology to build unbreakable watches that resist the harshest natural elements. The Mudmaster is just one timepiece in G-Shock's new Master of G collection, all built to withstand punishing conditions across land, sea and air. Whether vou're an ambitious weekend adventurer, a dedicated member of the emergency services, or even a firefighter in North Cascades, G-Shock can always be relied upon. Available from Goldsmiths stores and online; g-shock.co.uk

Right: North
Cascades'
smokejumpers
chop down trees
to stop forest
fires from
spreading
Below: The
G-Shock
Mudmaster is
built to function
in extreme
conditions





#### **G-Shock GWG-1000 Mudmaster**

Weight: 100g | Barometer: 260 hPa to 1,100 hPa | Water resistance: 200m Dropping shock resistance: 10m | Altimeter range: -700m-10,000m Case size: 59.5mm × 56.1mm × 18mm

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#### SAPPHIRE CRYSTAL

Clear, scratch-resistant sapphire crystal ensures excellent visibility

#### DUST-PROOF CROWN

The crown is protected by an airtight screwlock structure, with gaskets installed at points where it meets the surface of the case

COMP

SENSOR

RIPLE

#### MUD-RESISTANT BUTTONS The cylindrical button shafts

The cylindrical button shafts are fitted with gasket linings and pipes to stop mud and dust entering and to absorb shocks. Air vents positioned in the base of the shafts also prevent malfunctions due to any change in air pressure

#### /IBRATION-RESISTANT

Alpha Gel soft silicone is packed under and around the watch to protect it from damage caused by vibrations. Washers securing the lug screws prevent vibrations from loosening the band

#### **DOUBLE LED LIGHT**

Two LEDs illuminate the dial, while phosphorescence applied to the hour and minute hands and large hour markers make the watch clearly readable in low light conditions

#### COMPASS NEEDLE

Carbon material with low-specific gravity has made it possible to enlarge the second hand, which operates as a compass needle when used in conjunction with the digital display

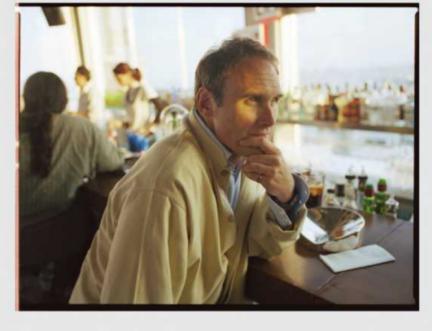
#### TRIPLE SENSOR

The altimeter, barometer and thermometer display accurate data on height, atmospheric pressure and temperature, while information is also shown in easy-to-read graphs and charts



SINCE IT WAS FOUNDED IN SWITZERLAND IN 1881, MOVADO HAS EARNED MORE THAN 100 PATENTS AND 200 INTERNATIONAL AWARDS FOR ARTISTRY AND INNOVATION IN WATCH DESIGN AND TIME TECHNOLOGY. THIS RICH HERITAGE OF INNOVATION CONTINUES TO DEFINE THE MOVADO BRAND AND TO DISTINGUISH ITS LATEST WATCH DESIGNS, CELEBRATED FOR THEIR CLEAN, MODERN AESTHETIC.





The author in Istanbul in 2006, by then 21 years sober

## Pour Me

An exclusive extract from AA Gill's new memoir of his drinking days

THE THING MOST PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT DRUNKS and recovery is that everyone has a rock bottom... a decisive moment. It's how narratives and the stories of tragedy and redemption work: there needs to be catharsis. Some have them — a moment, a thing, a death, a prison sentence, a crash, an excommunication — but mostly they are only recognised in retrospect and are anecdotal. It doesn't feel like a single crisis after which there is understanding, acceptance and triumph.

I don't have a rock-bottom story. But there are things I turn into anecdotes for something to say and to remind myself. One is, I was drunk in Earl's Court, on Earl's Court Road. It was late at night, it was raining, I tripped and fell, straight forward onto my chin. I lay on the cold, wet pavement. I remember it really clearly, the feeling of my cheek on the sodden stone, cold as the mortuary slab, the gentle rain, the relief of having collapsed, not having to stagger any more, the reflective moon in the slick, the sound of wheels in the wet. Someone, a man, leant over me and said, "Are you all right?" I mumbled to leave me alone. Soaking and bleeding on the pavement in the rain seemed like the preferable option, all things considered. I can still feel the little chip out of my chin. And then there was Londonderry.

My American cousin Wendy, the photographer, thought that Northern Ireland would be fun and inspirational, and she asked me to go with her on a recce. This was the Eighties, it was particularly murderous there — a lot of bombs, a lot of shooting, a lot of intimidation and people in prison, a lot of groundbreaking kneecap replacement work done at the Royal Infirmary and not yet an inkling of a peace deal. So I said, "Sure". We went to Dublin just to have a look. I can't remember a thing about Dublin, just the taste of Guinness and Bushmills, and we took the train to Londonderry, got out at the station and asked the taxi driver to take us to the address she'd got. He looked at the paper and said, "Lucky you got the right sort of driver, the other sort wouldn't take you here."

"Which sort are you?" I asked.

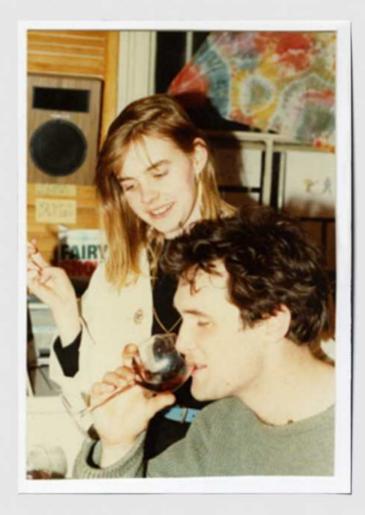
"The Republican sort," he smiled.

The photographic club who said they would be happy to put us up and offer assistance turned out to be a Sinn Fein front for collecting grant money, and the family who ran it were as close to being IRA as you could be without having shamrocks tattooed on your forehead. It was an uncountable number of brothers, I was never quite sure how many because some of them were in prison and some on the run, and there was a mother who was a head-splitting, gobby woman forbidden from entering the mainland and a poor father who was a silent, mousy postman. The sons all had lists of convictions for all sorts of political violence, including attempted murder of a policeman. But apart from all that they were warm, funny, hospitable, garrulous and catastrophically terrifying. They showed us round the city, pointing out martyrs on every street corner, and it was all fine until Sunday night when I said, "Let's go and get a drink."

And the boys said, "No, we'll stay in," and I said, "No, no, we'll go and get a drink," and as none of them had a job, I said, I'm paying. Actually, Wendy was paying. And they said, it wasn't that, it was that you couldn't get a drink on Sunday — this was like Scotland, teetotal for the Lord... and I can still taste the rising cold panic. I couldn't, simply couldn't go a whole night without a drink. I never had, not for years. I organised my intake, I knew what I needed, I couldn't sit in this tiny terraced house with the hit-squad boyos watching Val Doonican, slowly getting the shakes and swallowing panic.

"No, no, we've got to be able to get a drink somewhere?" I said. How close is the border? Now they were embarrassed and dogmatic, and then one of them said, "Oh for pity's sake, there's the club," and the others said, "No, no, there's no club," but I was on the club like a terrier with a duck in a canary cage. Yes, the club... let's do the club. A club would be just the thing. And I went on and on like a child who has forgotten his Ritalin. Finally, they said, "OK, we'll see if the club's open, but it's not a good idea. Keep your mouth shut." And with as much ill grace as they could muster and the brazen embarrassment of Wendy, we walked through the jolly evening drizzle of Derry. It was as if there was a voluntary curfew — no one was out. We traipsed across an emetically lit wasteland of ruin and finally, through a deserted, crepuscular alley, out of an unmarked doorway, a man, or rather the barely defined silhouette of a man with a turned-up collar and a broad-brimmed hat appeared. It was exactly the cover of a noir novel about the Troubles, and I would have laughed if I hadn't been so desperate. The brothers mumbled something and the man stood aside and the door let out a secret smear of light. We trooped upstairs to an empty room of trestle tables, chairs and a hatch in the wall that served as a bar, and I went to get in the pints of Guinness and the shots and I necked a couple as I waited for the barman to pour the beer — and I can still taste the relief. The cauterising of the panic with the stinging spirit. It is as pleasurable as any feeling I can directly attribute to alcohol. We sat back at the long table and the room began to fill up with hard men.

I've been in rooms with tough bastards all over the world: mercenaries, military, terrorists, religious maniacs - but this was special. Everyone got a brief whispered biography: five years in Long Kesh on remand; suspect; bomb-making; GBH — you don't want to go crossing him, he's banned... and you never saw him. I'd be introduced, or rather explained, and I'd get the stare from under those bony, hirsute brows and they'd sit with their pint and polish their ancient grievances and they'd start telling stories and pretty soon they were singing them... and I'd get up and get in more drinks and listen as they chatted over blood and earth and chant those Paddy ballads of sentiment, vengeance and unrequited nationhood with the verses that start in the Pale and end at a roadblock last week. The drink warmed my veins and relaxed my shoulders and I sat and listened and smiled and tapped my foot because I didn't know any of the words. And then



Gill and his first wife, Cressida Connolly, in his drinking years

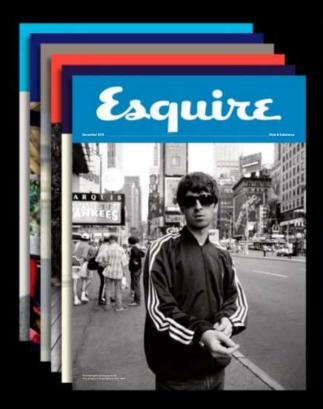
"When you stop drinking and taking drugs people say, 'What willpower.' The truth is exactly the opposite. All the fight goes into trying to keep going. Stopping is surrender. Living sober is nothing like as heroically gritty as trying to live stoned and drunk"

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#### "I simply couldn't go a whole night without a drink. I couldn't sit in this tiny house getting the shakes and swallowing panic"

one of the boys said, "Come on, Englishman, give us a song. We've been doing all the work here... you sing us something from your public school."

There is a moment in the chemistry of drink and the sociology of alcoholics where you reach optimum dosage. You never quite know where that is; it's a movable dram that peaks in the feeling that you're completely in control and that your control is balletic; you are a pilot capable of great sinuous acrobatics. Normally, this moment passes without consequence as you're standing at the urinal or queuing for the bar or caught in a circular conversation on the best way to get to Chalk Farm. But once in a blue moon, peak inebriation meets its moment, and this was one of those times. I pushed my chair back. Wendy grabbed my thigh and gave me a look of extreme caution and fear, but I was oblivious. I was untouchable, this was my moment... and I stood. Outside of church and "Happy Birthday" I have never, ever, sung in public — but I was golden. And I opened my mouth and out came a song I'd learnt in junior school, Mr Osborne waving a ruler like a bandmaster's baton.

I suppose what made me think of it was the rising whiskey-fuelled sense of ire and all the Saxon murder and mocking banter that was swilling around the room. I'd had summer and Saturday jobs on Kensington Church Street, where every other week we had bomb threats. I'd once cleared the men's shop I was an assistant in and was stood on the other side of the road waiting for the police to come and say it was a hoax when a woman hurried up to me and asked where her husband was.

"I don't know."

"But you were serving him," she said.

"Well, he went into the changing room."

"Didn't you check," she said.

"No. Do you want to go and get him," I said.

"No, you go and get him," she replied.

"He's your husband."

"He's your customer."

I found him standing in the middle of the shop in a suit that was far too big.

"There's a bomb," I said. "We're evacuating."

"Oh," he replied, "Do you want me to change?"

And there'd been enough real bombs in London. I heard the one that killed Gordon Hamilton Fairley, the cancer specialist whose dog set off a car bomb that was meant for Sir Hugh Fraser, so there was a rising bat squeak of "fuck you all" in my stance. I can't pretend that what came out of my mouth was political or committed, it was just a moment of omnipotent, golden, untouchable, witty brilliance.

"Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules, of Hector and Lysander, and such great names as these," I swelled to a Sunday baritone, the Fenian faces watching with a stony blankness, "but of all the world's great heroes, there is none that can compare, with a tow, row, row, row, row, row to the British Grenadiers."

If you haven't heard this before and you're an active, hands-on member of an Irish Republican paramilitary group, then the surprise, the punchline, is right at the end. I sat down. The bated moment hung in the tarry air. No one moved. There was a shrill silence, and then the man opposite me who had said little, the man I'd been told I should forget having ever seen, reached forward with remarkable speed and a big, practised hand, grasped the back of my neck and pulled my head across the table until his face was an inch from mine and I was staring into his pale, unreadable eyes.

"You," he said quietly, but loud enough for his voice to shiver the furniture, "you are either the bravest or the stupidest man in all Ireland tonight."

There was a beat. He let go of my neck, rocked back in his seat and breathed out a great guffawing laugh. The room erupted in Hibernian hilarity. My head was slapped, the pints lined up. I was so full of retrospective adrenalin that I drank the lot of them under the table. And as we walked home through the silent, miserable Derry streets, one of the brothers said, "You know, they were the worst regiment we ever had here, the Grenadier Guards, bastards... kicked in doors, wrecking houses, beating the shit out of kids... really vicious fucks."

The song, "The British Grenadiers", was originally Dutch, "Mars van de jonge Prins van Friesland", brought over to England by William who was married to the Stuart Mary and became our royal Bill who beat James II at the Battle of the Boyne, just up the road from where we were, so this may well have been the first place anyone heard that song. I was, inadvertently, bringing it home.

That would be a good rock-bottom story, an illustration of the wilful out-of-controlness of drink, the edge it pushes you over. So let's leave it there and cut to the bit where I shake hands with the doctor and am hugged by other hopeful patients as I leave Clouds House Rehabilitation Clinic for the variously addicted and walk into a new sober life. But it wasn't like that. I continued to drink for years after that, and the real rock bottom is when all the stories and the tales are past but their consequences litter your life, and inside, you're like... shellshocked. It was just me alone in a room with the curtains pulled and the telly on, twisted and desperate with guilt and frustration. The end isn't dramatic or

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an exclamatory narrative, it's just when nothing works and nothing helps and there are no more angles and no more panaceas. There's nothing left to say and no one left who's listening.

When you stop drinking and taking drugs people say, "Well done." "Congratulations." "What inner strength." "What grit." "What willpower." Well, the truth is exactly the opposite. All the stubborn willpower, all the straining, all the fight goes into trying to keep going, to keep using. Stopping is surrender, putting up your hands. Living sober is nothing like as heroically gritty as trying to live stoned and drunk. So this is what really happened. I went to a doctor to pick up Melanie's daughter. Melanie was the woman who had taken me in, and I loved. Her daughter Fleur needed an injection, she was going on holiday. I avoided doctors, I didn't like them... I didn't want to hear what they had to say. The little girl bounced out of the consulting room and the doctor followed; he was about my age. I stood up to go.

"Are you Adrian?" he said. "Do you want to just step into the office for a moment?"

"No, I've got to take Fleur home."

"It's all right, she'll be fine here, it'll only take a couple of minutes."  $\,$ 

"There's nothing the matter with me."

"Well, Melanie is worried about you and asked me to see you."

So I went into Guy's room and sat down... and he said it was the drinking, and I said, I thought as much, but it was fine. She was overreacting. You know women, always worrying. And he said could I answer some questions as honestly as possible... And I said as long as I don't have to write the answers... And he started the standard 20 questions that are used to ascertain alcohol abuse.

On any other day I'd have lied. Any drunk worth his drink would have lied, but for some reason I told the truth. I think the fact that he was quite like me and noticeably non-judgmental, almost unconcerned, tipped it. I appreciated the insouciance.

He came to the end and said, "Well, if you answer yes to three of the questions we consider you have a problem with alcohol. You have only answered no to two — have you ever lost any time off work through drink, and did you drink whilst pregnant? I'm pretty confident in saying that you're an alcoholic."

He wasn't the first person to mention it. I paused and said, "OK, what can you give me for it?"

"It doesn't work like that," he said. I had, by some ridiculous good fortune, stumbled upon one of the very few doctors in Britain who didn't treat alcoholism as valium deficiency.

"You should go into treatment," said Guy. "It's a new idea that's come from America. You go away to a house in the country and stay for as long as it takes, but it'll be a minimum of three weeks and you come out with the best chance of leading a sober and clean life. The answer, I'm afraid, is abstinence. There is no controlled drinking or casual drug-taking, no exeat for Christmas and birthdays or very, very good claret."

He pointed out that I would already have tried all that, tinkered with the dosages and volumes, set up numerous rules, made promises, tried to do deals with fate and God... and that doesn't work.

"Do you have health insurance?"

Of course I didn't have health insurance.

"Well, I'm afraid this is going to be quite expensive." I said I'd go, and Guy said, "Can you go now?"

Oh, no, no, no, no, I have things to do, business to settle. Of course I had nothing to do or settle.

"When will you go?" he asked.

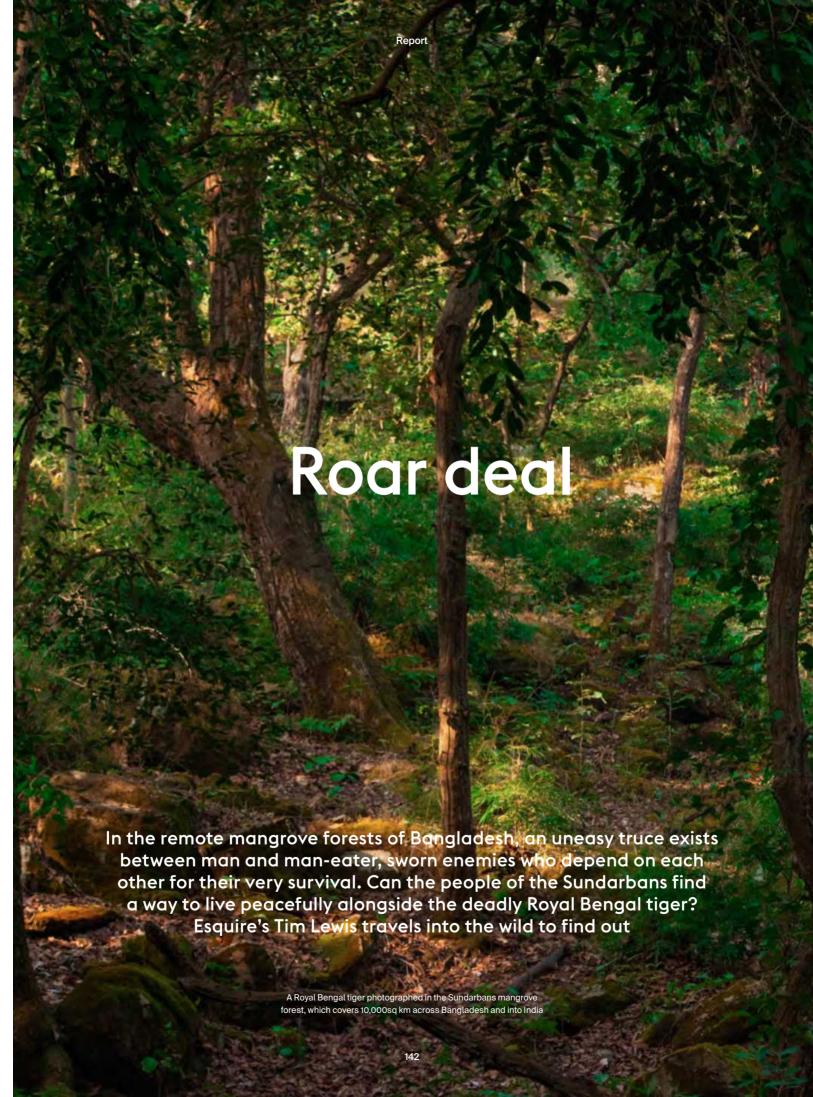
"Two weeks, a fortnight."

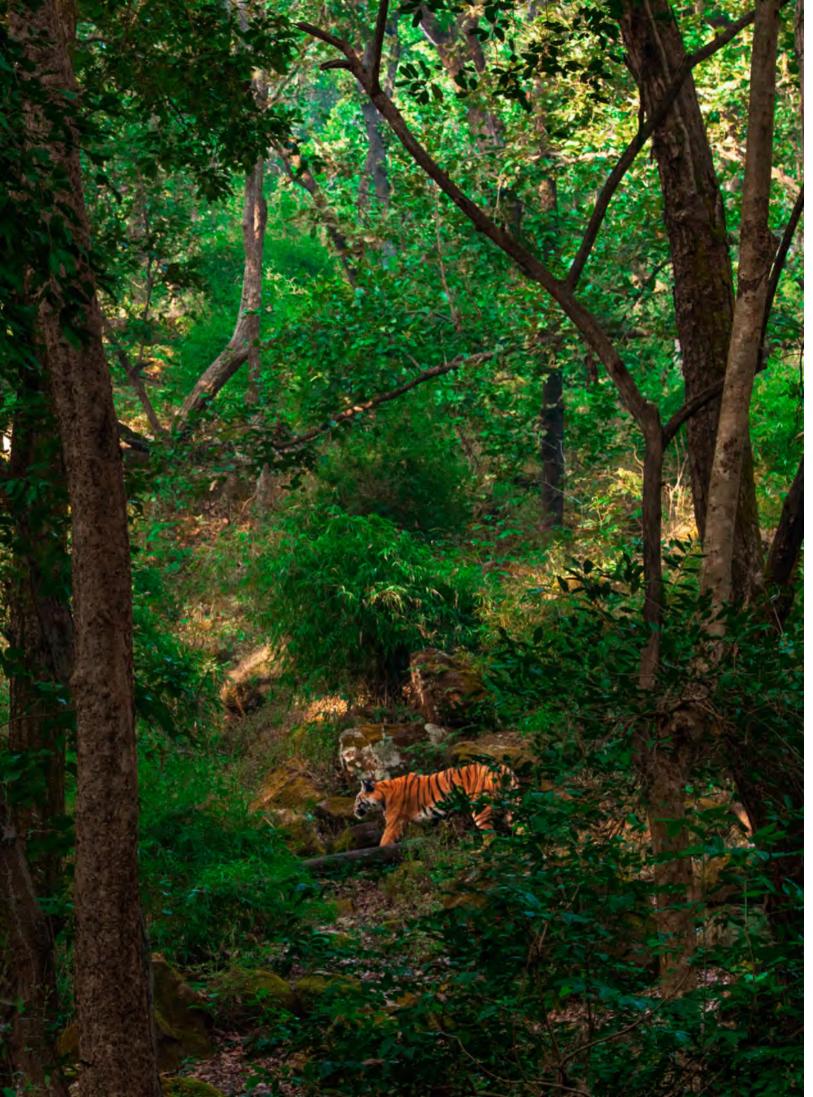
He looked at his diary. "That's April 1st - is that a joke?"

The second fortuitous thing was that I didn't walk out of the surgery and tell Melanie everything was fine, but she needed a new doctor; I went to see my dad, sobbed and asked him to pay for me to go to treatment. And he said how relieved and pleased he was, and did I want to do Freudian analysis instead? Miraculously, I said no. And two weeks later I was on the train to East Knoyle in Wiltshire. My dad came with me, Melanie took us to the station and gave him a wicker basket with a gingham cloth. Inside were pork pies, a fruit cake and two bottles of vintage Champagne — dad and I drank the Champagne. He had a glass, I had a bottle and a half. But I think he ate most of the pork pie. I don't know if I ever thanked my dad for taking me. At the time, obviously, I was drunk and frightened and desperate, wearing a suit with a bow tie. I remember the journey as being pleasant, like travelling through an Eric Ravilious illustration, pale, rhythmic, nostalgic. I was 30. I didn't need him to hold my hand, but he did, because he was my dad. And now I wish I'd told him it meant a great deal to me. At the sanatorium they breathalysed me and the nurse said she hoped I hadn't driven there. Daddy hugged me, wished me well and took the train back to London. 4



Readers of Esquire may order copies of Pour Me for the special price of £17 (RRP £20) by calling 01903 828 503 and quoting ref no RI079.





SHOULD YOU EVER BE MAULED by a Royal Bengal tiger, it is likely you will be attacked from behind. The animal will leap for your throat and snap your windpipe and spinal cord, using its clumpy paws with claws that retract, much like a kitty-cat's, to keep you from wriggling too much. If you look into its eyes, you'll notice the irises are amber and viscous like a healing crystal. Then, when you stop thrashing around, it will drag your corpse into a private spot and begin a nose-to-tail portioning of meals. It will start with your thighs and buttocks, the most succulent meat, and pick its way through to the gnarly bits over the next three to five days.

This information is imparted to me, without sensation or hysteria, by a 37-year-old man called Mohammad Abdul Goni, known to everyone as Tiger Goni. We are sheltering from an unholy downpour in the cabin of a chugging, belching launch shaped like a Jack Purcell high-top. The boat is moored besides a village called Horinogor opposite the Sundarbans mangrove forest in Bangladesh. I had been forewarned that Goni was eccentric and maniacally brave — "nuts" was the word used — and it was

said he believes he can communicate with tigers. I began to imagine a Kurtz-esque off-the-grid renegade. So, I am disappointed to find a smiley father-of-two with cropped hair and a bright polo shirt who, stood next to me, barely comes up to my armpits.

Goni has the oddest job description I've ever come across: he rescues - or recovers the bodies of - people who have been savaged by tigers in the Bangladeshi Sundarbans. As soon as he receives a call, day or night, Goni and two colleagues from the Emergency Response Team (ERT) jump in their boat and head to the spot where the victim was last sighted. Whatever the state of the body, and whether the tiger has finished its meal or not, Goni's sworn assignation is to deliver the remains either to a hospital or back to the victim's home village. Most Bangladeshis are Muslim and, according to shariah law, burial should take place as soon as possible after death. Since 2007, he estimates he has retrieved 100 victims of tiger attacks from the forest and saved more than 30 lives.

So, how does Goni feel about tigers? Does he fear them? Hate them? "No," he replies, sucking on his cigarette. Goni smokes relentlessly, but when your job is rescuing dismembered bodies from the jaws of tigers, you maybe don't worry so much about your nicotine intake. "I love the tiger just a little less than I love my mother. For us, in the Sundarbans, they are priceless things. Without the tigers, our existence is in danger." It is an unexpected answer from someone in his line of work. Yet, during two weeks in Bangladesh, I hear the sentiment expressed by nearly everyone I speak to about the Bengal tiger: from fishermen and honey collectors, whose lives are in peril every time they step in the forest, to even victims of tiger attacks and the widows whose husbands died. People revere them almost as gods. And, in a bizarre twist, each now depends on the other for its survival.

For thousands of years - since tigers wandered into these parts from south China and Southeast Asia - an arrangement of sorts has existed between man and beast. Inhabited areas belonged to the people who lived there; should tigers enter them, they could expect to be surrounded and battered to death by villagers. But the Sundarbans forest - protected by Unesco as a World Heritage site and uninhabited in Bangladesh - was definitely theirs. It is common, for both Hindus and Muslims, to offer a prayer to Bonbibi, the lady of the forest, when they enter the Sundarbans to protect them from the tigers. One begins, "Mother, we are entering your kingdom..."

In recent years, however, the relationship has changed dramatically. As we speak, Goni constantly glances at his mobile phone, as though he might be called into action any second. But it doesn't ring, and the reality is that the ERT has not been so busy of late. In fact, when we meet in mid-May, he has not had to retrieve a single body in 2015. It's very hard to gauge accurately how many people are killed by tigers in the Sundarbans annually: one recent study from Jahangirnagar University in Savar put the average figure at 27 per year in Bangladesh; dig around, though, and you can find estimates from a handful up to 150. Goni's not sure, either, but he remembers 2010 and 2011 as being especially busy.

In one sense, of course, declining numbers are good news. After all, human lives are at stake, a fact that for Goni, and many others round here, has a personal resonance. In 2007, before he worked with the ERT, Goni was harvesting honey one day, high up in a tree, when he heard screams





Top: known as Tiger Goni, Mohammad Abdul Goni (centre), works for WildTeam's Emergency Response Team, recovering bodies of people attacked and killed by Bengal tigers. Bottom: A rare shot capturing a tiger charging towards human prey — the photographer

Right: Relatives prepare a man for cremation after he was killed by a tiger, Tala village, Madhya Pradesh State, India, 2010. One study from Jahangirnagar University in Savar put the number of people slaughtered by tigers in Bangladesh at 27 per year

from below. Through the smoke the collectors billow out to anaesthetise the wild bees, his saw his friend being attacked by a tiger.

"I was in a fix," he recalls. "I couldn't decide what to do. After a few moments, I climbed down the tree, picked up my stick and went to the tiger. I was face to face with him; he roared at me and it was so noisy that it felt like the ground shook. I roared back and we stood for some minutes until the tiger eventually retreated. But my friend was dead." Goni looks down at the floor. "If I had taken the decision a little faster then perhaps I could have saved his life."

But the decrease in attacks on humans also hints at a worrying development: the tigers themselves are being killed off at an alarming rate, mainly by poachers to service a lucrative trade in body parts for traditional medicines, especially in China, and skins



## Goni was up a tree when a tiger attacked his friend. "After a few moments, I came down and faced it until it retreated. But he was dead. If I acted faster, I could have saved him"

for interior decoration. With the global population of tigers in the wild estimated by the National Geographic Society at just 2,500 — a fall of 97 per cent in the last century — there is genuine concern the animal could become extinct, perhaps by 2022, ironically the next Chinese year of the tiger. In this context, the Sundarbans, with numbers of Royal Bengal tigers in the hundreds, remains one of the last strongholds on the planet.

While I am in Bangladesh, a comprehensive tiger survey is being carried out by the Forest Department, its results due in a couple of months. Goni, and many others, are pessimistic both for the tigers and for the effect their dwindling numbers will have on the human population and the Sundarbans. "People say that eight tigers are killed every month by poachers," he says. "I don't think that's true, but the accidents are occurring much less than before, for sure."

THE EARLIEST KNOWN MENTION of man-eating tigers in these parts is from 1599, in letters from Portuguese Jesuit missionaries. Tigers are adaptable and extraordinarily efficient predators, but they are mostly secretive and reclusive and do not typically have a taste for human flesh.

Something, though, in the humid, salty and remote mangrove forests is clearly different: these particular tigers never feared man. During colonial times, when the global tiger population was around 100,000 and the Sundarbans extended hundreds of miles north to the suburbs of the city of Calcutta, tigers were said to be responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people every year.

The Royal Bengal tiger, Panthera tigris tigris, is not "royal" at all: that was just the name given to it by the British because of its mood and attitude. Befitting their regal nomenclature, Bengal tigers are feared and revered among the nine subspecies that scientists recognise. Shere Khan, the villain of Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book, is one; so, too, is Richard Parker, the misnamed antagonist in Yann Martel's Man Booker Prize-winning novel, The Life of Pi. Even as he faces his imminent demise, the story's hero Pi Patel is beguiled by this creature who we learn was captured in the Bangladeshi Sundarbans before ending up in the life raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

"What art, what might," Martel writes. "His body, bright brownish orange streaked with black vertical stripes, was incomparably beautiful, matched with a tailor's eye for

harmony by his pure white chest and underside and the black rings of his long tail... [His] face looked like the wings of a butterfly and bore an expression vaguely old and Chinese. Every hair on me was standing up, shrieking with fear."

Like all societal misfits, Royal Bengal tigers are partly a product of their upbringing and environment. Mangrove forests are low-lying tracts of salt-resilient trees that are neither quite sea nor land. Mangroves are mostly found in the tropics and are typically small, but the Sundarbans — at the mouth of the Ganges Delta, 60 per cent in Bangladesh, the rest in India — is the largest expanse in the world. At 10,000sq km, it's just a little smaller than Yorkshire. Its name possibly comes from the Bengali language, meaning "the forest of beautiful trees", but equally could derive from sundari, the dominant tree of the area.

The Sundarbans is, in some senses, a place of substantial bounty. It is home to unfathomable varieties of trees, birds and reptiles; humans — up to 300,000 every day — enter to fish, collect wood and the most delicious honey, available for only a few weeks each year. But this is also a place of hardship. Tigers, the largest of the





big cats, have evolved to be about half the size in the Sundarbans than they are elsewhere. Uniquely, they have taught themselves to swim and, when they're in the mood, paddle so furiously they can keep pace with a motorboat. And they have been forced to eat whatever they can catch, which means fish, monitor lizards and, at a stretch, human beings.

It is a menacing landscape, defined by forbidding aerial tree roots (pneumatophores), which rise upwards from the gloopy swampland like spikes to provide oxygen for the mangroves. That, combined with the mud, which envelops you up to your knees with every step, deters all but the most intrepid, or desperate, visitors. Besides tigers there are king cobras, other venomous snakes including kraits, sharks and saltwater crocodiles, which scare Goni more than anything. The land, which is on sea level and sinking, is prone to flooding and is sporadically battered by cyclones. The last big one, Cyclone Aila in 2009, saw the water rise by six metres and made over half a million Bangladeshis homeless.

If that wasn't enough, there are human dangers, too: dacoits (bands of pirates) patrol the waterways armed with AK-47s, extorting money from anyone who makes a living here. If they don't pay, the dacoits kidnap their relatives and demand a swingeing ransom. Considerable resentment has built: not long ago in Horinogor, where I meet Goni, three pirates turned up at a local market and, unarmed and outnumbered, were set upon and killed by villagers.

The Sundarbans is often labelled one of the most dangerous spots on Earth and certainly there can't be many places facing its challenges. Yet within this hostile and dysfunctional environment, the Royal Bengal tiger assumes a strange and surprising authority. In one sense, it presents the most terrifying threat to the 1.7m Bangladeshis living on the borders of the forest and who depend on its bounty for their livelihoods. Research done by the University of Kent in 2013 identified 24 "locally relevant" dangers, from climate change to the pirates, faced by the people of the Sundarbans. Tellingly, the only threat cited by more than 50 per cent of respondents was being attacked

Nevertheless, the extinction of tigers in the Sundarbans would create many more problems than it solves. Without them lurking in the shadows, many more people than currently do so would enter the forest. "Even my wife would go in and cut trees!" one fisherman I meet says. In no time, locals believe, the natural resources of the Sundarbans would be stripped. Even the meagre existence they enjoy in the poorest corner

of one of the poorest countries in the world would be taken from them.

Although tigers are terrifying, it's felt they are at least fair. The same cannot be said of the dacoits or even employees of the government's Forest Department, underpaid and overworked, who nominally have authority over the region. The cynicism is understandable. In 2012, the carcass of a tiger was found in the forest: it had been skinned, its head and paws hacked off and its entrails cleaned out; the Forest Department reported that it had died of "old age". "Only the tigers can save the Sundarbans," the fisherman goes on to say. "You can bribe the Forest Department, you can handle the pirates with money. But you cannot corrupt the tiger."

My JOURNEY TO THE SUNDARRANS had been an unexpected one. A couple of years ago, I was contacted by an old zoologist friend, Adam Barlow, who had read an article I'd written. We'd met in our halls of residence at university and had bonded, during our initiation to the rugby club, over the fact that neither of us much fancied eating a Mars bar covered with pubic hair. We hadn't spoken for almost 20 years, and it turned out that for much of the last decade he had been living in Bangladesh working with a non-profit called the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (now rebranded as WildTeam) on a research project about the region's man-eating residents. One of the most conspicuous dangers that tigers faced came when they wandered into inhabited areas, usually by accident or desperation, and they were attacked by villagers. Confronting a tiger conferred great status: one study found that 89.4 per cent of people agreed with the statement that "people who kill tigers are brave".

After detailed consultations with villagers across the Sundarbans, Adam came up with a counter-intuitive proposal: the formation of Volunteer Tiger Retrieval Teams (VTRT). When a tiger entered a village, these unpaid locals would take charge and return the animal, where possible, to the forest. Adam knew the idea was a gamble: "The big question," he told me, "was why would they ever spend their time being trained and then risk their lives saving tigers?"

I told Adam I'd like to go with him to Bangladesh. The appeal was not strictly based on checking up on the work of the VTRT. Mainly, I just wanted to see a Royal Bengal tiger in the wild. The attraction, in part, was that this was a long way from the traditional safari experience. In the Sundarbans, there are no trackers out in the field, finding the animals each morning, while you toddle along in a Land Rover sipping

chilled bottled water. No one could predict if you would see a tiger and how it would respond if you did cross paths. It felt dangerous, primitive, vital, especially sitting at a desk thousands of miles away contemplating it. Of course, I wasn't wholly unaware of the idiocy of it, too: the people who enter the Sundarbans every day do so because they have no alternative; a privileged person actively looking for a Royal Bengal tiger becomes, in this sense, a little insulting.

By the time we'd made the arrangements, Adam was living back in the UK, but I decided to go anyway. I'd read enough to have some appreciation of how precariously balanced the situation was; it was now or never if Royal Bengal tigers were going to be saved in Bangladesh. To add extra intrigue and jeopardy, the only people who could secure their future were the ones most at risk of being attacked by them. We spoke on the phone before I left and the last thing Adam said was, "You'd be the only westerner to be eaten by a tiger in 200 years or something. It could be one of those emotional pieces where I finish it off for you."

Out in Bangladesh, the difference the VTRT programme had made became clear. There are 49 teams across the Sundarbans and more than 360 volunteers. Since they were formed in 2008, there have been more than 50 incidences of tigers entering a village and none so far has resulted in the death of a tiger. When one of the volunteers was killed by a tiger, there was concern that the whole system of VTRTs might unravel. Instead, the dead man's son took his place on the team. The fact that they are not paid has proved to be a masterstroke: the villagers appear to feel it is their project, not one imposed on them by a remote authority.

In the village of Kadamtala, I meet eight VTRT volunteers: they include fishermen, a carpenter, small-business owners; they are aged between 20 and 70, and all wear orange hi-vis vests, one of the few rewards of their job. In 2008, a tiger had entered Kadamtala and killed three people and picked off a few chickens and goats. Eventually, a mob formed of many thousands from all around the surrounding areas and cornered the tiger in a house. A fishing net was

thrown over the exits to stop it escaping; it was restrained with a lasso and savagely bludgeoned to death. "Everybody wanted revenge for the people the tiger killed," says Mohammad Hossein Ali, a volunteer. "Very few people had sympathy with the tiger; the majority wanted the tiger to die."

Then, only four years later, in 2011, Kadamtala's VTRT team, under Adam's guidance, became the first to successfully tranquillize a tiger and return it to the wild. So what changed? "Before, we didn't realise how important the Sundarbans is, and how important the tiger is for the Sundarbans," says Mohammad Hossein Ali. "The Sundarbans is how all of us here make our living. It provides us with oxygen and it protects us from cyclones. If we can protect the Sundarbans, then maybe our next generation will not face such great problems."

THERE IS SOMETHING hypnotic about the Sundarbans. It's not so much that it is beautiful; the landscape, viewed from WildTeam's launch, is in fact relatively monotonous: the trees are low, dense,

## "We didn't realise how important the tiger is for the forest, which provides oxygen and protects us from cyclones. If we protect it, we will not face such great problems in the future"



impenetrable. What you do feel, though, is an eerie sense of menace: it's misty, often spooky, and you're constantly aware you are far away from help. If I lived in the Sundarbans, I'm pretty sure I'd believe in spirits, too. No one is in control: not the government, not the villagers, not even the tigers. It feels, in the true sense of the word, wild.

Part of the incongruity comes from how different the Sundarbans is from the rest of Bangladesh. With 164m people in a land just fractionally bigger than England, this is one of the most densely populated places on the planet; the only countries more crammed are tiny nation-states such as Monaco and Vatican City. Bangladesh, especially its gridlocked capital Dhaka, is frenetic and impossible. Yet, here is an uninhabited, undiscovered region where you can chug around for a day in a boat and scarcely see another soul; the dacoits tend not to bother westerners because it will bring too much attention to their activities. The Sundarbans feels old-fashioned, even

These men are handcuffed after trying to sell tiger skins, Chandrapur, India, 2011. The trade in bone and skins is run by crime syndicates that also traffic drugs and guns

ancient: in some villages, locals still fish at night with short-haired otters, as they have done for centuries; the otters are harnessed and herd the fish into a net to receive offcuts from the catch.

My stay in the Sundarbans is full of incongruous experiences. One day, I watch a group of children sprint from the water after seeing a venomous snake swimming towards them; I assume they are scared, but they run to get sticks to pummel it, long past the point a referee should have intervened. In complete darkness one night, my translator, Robi, began singing, almost in falsetto: "Near, far, wherever you are..." He knocks out the whole thing, word perfect, and announces, "That is a tune from Titanic by the Canadian artist Celine Dion." I ask if he knows any more tunes and he sings a Limp Bizkit number. I meet one tourist in my entire trip, a French girl who, after two months in India, is grateful she is no longer seen as a "walking wallet". This is remarkable and sad considering what Bangladesh has to offer visitors.

In 1989, Ted Hughes, then the poet laureate, spent 10 days in Bangladesh. He told his hosts that he wanted to visit the Sundarbans and see a Royal Bengal tiger. He was informed, with a smile: "We can take you to the tigers, but we cannot guarantee that the tigers will come to you!" In the event he didn't see any, but he was inspired to compose a number of poems, notably "Four Things Created by God", in praise of the tiger and its magical homeland. It ends: "Bangladesh take care of the Sundarbans."

I'm not sure when it becomes clear to me that I am not going see a Royal Bengal tiger. I'm equally unclear whether I am disappointed or mightily relieved. But, like Hughes, it was more of a preoccupation before my visit than it is when I am in the Sundarbans. When you are there, it makes perfect sense that there is a near-mythical creature that is both the greatest threat to interlopers and also the benign protector of the region. It begins to feel almost churlish to demand that it show itself. It's that religious idea that if you need proof something exists then you are not worthy of seeing it. Or maybe it's just really difficult in a deep, tangled forest to spot a rare and solitary animal that only moves for four hours a day.

It's tempting, as Hughes did, to beseech Bangladesh to look after the Sundarbans and its tiger population. But it's also not a stretch to see how maintaining an area of pristine wilderness might not be a preoccupation of those leading the country. Bangladesh is a nation that only appears on the international agenda in the aftermath of a disaster. In recent times, headlines have come from the collapse of the Rana Plaza



A pregnant tigress is released into the Sundarikati River. She was rescued by forest workers after being stoned and badly beaten by villagers in the Sundarbans forest, February 2008

sweatshop in 2013 that led to the death of 1,100 workers. Or the four violent and very public assassinations of secular bloggers that have been a recurring story throughout 2015. Watching the slow and begrudging attempts to prosecute the guilty in those cases makes it hard to imagine that police will track down the poachers and the dacoits, who operate with the sophistication of drug syndicates, in the Sundarbans.

On my final day in Bangladesh, back in Dhaka, I visit Dr Anwarul Islam, the genial CEO of WildTeam. The NGO is flourishing these days: it has 80 full-time staff, all Bangladeshi, and recently won a \$12m grant from the United States Agency for International Development to fund its activities for the next four years. Still, the tone of my conversation with Dr Anwarul is mostly a little gloomy. The battle to save the Royal Bengal tigers has become less about conservation and more about gathering intelligence on poachers and working with law-enforcement agencies. Bangladesh scores very badly on any corruption index so this is inevitably a frustrating path. Convincing politicians, starting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to become seriously invested in the subject remains a hope, though not a serious expectation.

"If our prime minister says, 'I declare war against the poachers! I am going to do everything to protect the tigers', then she becomes a world leader for tiger conservation," Dr Anwarul says. "We tell the Forest Department that, but we are not allowed to reach the prime minister." He shrugs

and continues, "But if you look at our population, look at the area we have, look at our challenges — should she talk about humans? Or talk about tigers? It's not a priority area, that's the problem."

A shake of the head. "The Sundarbans are our Taj Mahal," says Dr Anwarul. "You can build 10 Taj Mahals, but you can't build the Sundarbans. Everyone knows that."

AT THE END OF JULY, the results of the tiger census in Bangladesh were announced. The news wasn't good. In 2004, the previous survey estimated there were 440 Royal Bengal tigers in the region; now, there are somewhere between 83 and 130, a 75 per cent reduction. The statistics, reported by both the BBC and The New York Times, were shocking enough that there was an immediate response from the Bangladeshi government. In early August, police, acting on a tip-off about a tiger-poaching ring, raided a hideout deep in the Sundarbans. A 20-minute shoot-out ensued, leaving seven poachers dead and a handful of officers injured. Three mature, 10ft tiger skins were seized, each with a value of £2,000 and all of which, from their look and smell, had been taken in the previous week.

Whether this was a show of force, in part to impress foreign eyes, or the start of a much-needed crackdown on poaching, only time will tell. By 2090, the population of Bangladesh is projected to reach 300m; that's awfully crowded and it's not easy to see where the Royal Bengal tigers will fit in. "You have to be hopeful, otherwise you are hopeless," says Tiger Goni, back on the boat. He flicks his umpteenth cigarette out the window of the cabin into the water: "Even if there is only one tiger left, we will do everything in our power to protect it."



## "The stage was set. And we turned up. And the people said, 'Yes.' And then it just exploded"

Twenty years after Britpop, Noel Gallagher is still our most outspoken rock star. Exclusively for Esquire, he talks about the highs and lows of Oasis, marriage, midlife crises, fame, fatherhood, going solo and life as the last of a dying breed. Little spotty herberts (and Radiohead) need not read on...

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I HOPE IT WON'T SOUND TOO MUCH like dereliction of duty but when the subject of an interview is as garrulous and opinionated and indiscreet and just plain entertaining as Noel Gallagher is, the job of the journalist is simply to turn up with a fully charged Dictaphone and press "record".

There's little need for searching questions or penetrating insights, and good luck with trying to get a word in even if you had arrived armed with those. (I'd had a bash, of course, as you do, but I needn't have bothered.)

Better to sit back, keep quiet, and enjoy the show. It's not that one is a non-participant exactly, just that the vacancy is for an audience member and the requirement is to nod, laugh or grimace at the right moments.

Only a handful of times in the two hours and more we spent talking did I — gently — attempt to steer the conversation, to pick Noel up on some small point of fact, or challenge an opinion.

"Honestly," he said, exasperated, after perhaps the third such timid intervention, "you're like my missus, you are. You're interrupting! You're putting me in a corner!"

"Sorry," I said, but he'd already started on the next anecdote, so he didn't hear me.

We met in the sitting room of a substantial house in Hampstead, North London, on a late afternoon in early autumn. This wasn't Noel's house or mine, the latter possibility less likely given the size and neighbourhood and air of deep-pocketed seclusion. It had been hired for the day as the location for the *Esquire* cover shoot. Neither of us had been before and it's not likely we'll go again. But for a couple of hours, the tasteful greys and muted beiges, smooth surfaces and soft furnishings of this spacious room served as Noel's stage. I settled myself at right angles to him on a low suede sofa and waited for the fireworks. I didn't have to wait long.

It's hard to express quite how refreshing it is to interview a famous person who not only feels that giving funny, honest, even outrageous answers to a journalist's questions is part of the job of being a performer. More than that, to meet a celebrity who genuinely enjoys the process of being interviewed, who wouldn't rather be somewhere, *anywhere*, else doing something, *anything*, else.

At one stage I wondered if Noel has any hobbies.

"This is my hobby!"

"You mean, music?"

"No! This: doing interviews. I fucking love it. I could do this all day long. It's sick."

"Why do you love it so much?"

"Because I get to be a gobshite, and I get to do that thing: to be the last of a dying breed."

A trim, 48-year-old father of three in a navy knitted shirt, light grey jeans and dark grey trainers, the last of a dying breed is not a big man, but he fills a room. It's not just that he's instantly recognisable: the caterpillar eyebrows, the screwed-on-sideways hair, the features hewn from Northern granite and the accent straight from Central Casting (Kitchen Sink Department). It's that in spirit and action he's exactly as advertised: wry, cocksure, spectacularly self-assured.

What might in anyone else be insufferable — the absolute certainty of the rightness of his own exalted position, the total belief in the value of his judgments, his tastes, his world view — is made somehow acceptable, even charming, by the self-mocking smile, the delighted laughter at his own hyperbolic pronouncements and the man-of-the-people lack of vanity. He's the working class hero who makes boastfulness likeable. He's been getting away with it for years, and he knows it. If he's not careful, he's likely to become a national treasure, like his hero Sir Paul McCartney: Lord Gallagher of Burnage.

Those who came in late need know only this: that for almost two decades, from 1991 to 2009, Noel was the leader of Oasis. (I'm calling him Noel not to be overfamiliar but because that's what you'd call him if you bumped into him in the street; a more likely event than you might imagine, given his freewheeling approach to fame; given his freewheeling approach to everything.)

He was Oasis's songwriter, guitarist, spokesman and sometimes singer, too, though not the only face of the band: his younger brother Liam, the comically truculent lead singer ("our kid", as he was more often called), took equal top billing, in the tabloids and on TV if not in the studio. While lurching from triumph to disaster and back again, Oasis released seven studio albums,

sold 70m records and played to countless stadiums full of numberless fans: a roiling human sea of shaggy hair and Premier League shirts under anoraks, a lairy, sweary, beery singalong that reached a peak in August 1996 with two concerts at Knebworth in front of a total of 250,000-plus people. (More than two million had applied for tickets.) For all those post-internet millennials who can't remember because they weren't there, Oasis at that time were bigger than any band then, any band since and, with a few famous exceptions, any band before.

One of three brothers (Paul, Noel and Liam) from a working class Irish Catholic family - a family scarred by the violence of the Gallaghers' father, Tommy - Noel was the teenage tearaway who, inspired by the canon of English rock, from The Beatles and The Rolling Stones to The Smiths and The Stone Roses, taught himself guitar and threw himself into the febrile Manchester music scene of the late Eighties - hanging out at the Haçienda, raving in the fields of Lancashire, working as a roadie - before accepting Liam's invitation to join the younger Gallagher's band. By that time, Noel had already begun to write the songs - potent, propulsive and anthemic - that would make them rich and notorious.

The rowdy Gallaghers were throwbacks almost before they began. Oasis was a British band on a mission to conquer the world: brash, cocky and confrontational. They wanted to "have it", and have it they did.

And if their music was often presented as conservative and derivative, and Noel and Liam were characterised by the press as cartoon oiks (this was the now dim and distant era of the New Lad), then that, frankly, was the spirit of the age. Oasis, alongside their great rivals Blur and others, provided not only the soundtrack to the Britpop Nineties — that retrospective riot of Sixties-style Anglophilia — but also the swagger.

During his time in Oasis, Noel married and divorced Meg Mathews, with whom he has a daughter, Anaïs, now 15; moved into and out of the house in North London he named Supernova Heights, for a time the most infamous private residence in the country; found a new wife, Sara MacDonald, with

"Once I'd got the record deal, my whole MO was, I'm going to London and I'm going to get involved. I got on the train with a holdall and I never, ever went back. I was like, 'Give it to me, I f\*\*king want it."

whom he has two boys, Donovan, eight, and Sonny, five; took a lot of cocaine and then stopped; hurled insults; caused punch-ups; made a considerable fortune and won the admiration of a generation, particularly the male half of it, around the world.

The end came in August 2009 in Paris, when Noel quit the band, apparently for good, after yet another backstage bust-up with his brother. Two years later, he launched a successful solo career with Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds. Earlier this year, his second album, *Chasing Yesterday*, was released, and he has already started work on a third. He has become, like his friends Paul Weller and Morrissey, an elder statesman of British rock. Not that his edges have been blunted. The chaos has died down (he's a happily married dad now, not a drug-addled reprobate) but the appetites for incitement — and for good times — remain.

I've come prepared to ask him to talk about all this: the chaotic childhood; the ramshackle early years; Oasis's Imperial Phase; the break-ups and make-ups; the drugs and the women; the final implosion of Oasis; his re-emergence as a solo artist.

And we get to most of it, in a roundabout way. But one preoccupation keeps recurring: the protracted death of British rock music, the sad absence of an Oasis equivalent in today's sanitised mainstream pop culture.

This is what he means when he calls himself the last of a dying breed: a rock star who is loud and impolitic and larger than life and who decisively commandeers the cultural conversation. He feels that in this he is part of a tradition stretching back to the early days of rock'n'roll — "the poor boy done good", in his words — and that no one has come along to take his place, as he came along to take the places of Lennon and Lydon and Weller and the rest. That a music scene without a huge, headline-grabbing rock band in it is a paler place, that the music industry now promotes bland pop stars and toe-the-line groups more focused on their careers than on caning it, more worried about social media than shagging supermodels, more concerned with drippy songwriting than with danger and subversion and making a racket.

"The worst thing for an interviewer to say," he tells me, "if you're doing a big magazine: 'so, I want to talk about the new record.' You just go, 'God. *Why*? We've just listened to it. That's all there is to say about it.' People are not interested in how I went from G-minor to fucking F-sharp major."

"No, they're not. What do you like to be asked, then?"

"Anything other than that. I have an opinion on everything and if I don't have an opinion, I'll fucking make one up on the spot."

In that case, take it away, Noel...

1.

## "Hard work and a f\*\*king filthy tongue"

I was born in Longsight in Manchester, which is a really rough-arse part of town. They knocked our street down to build this new-fangled thing called an Asda superstore in the Seventies and we got housed in this place called Burnage, which at the time was quite a leafy suburb. But as the Seventies turned into the Eighties, it got a bit more desolate. There used to be a place called Renold Chains. It made chains for anchors on ships, big fucking things. When that shut down that was the end of it, really. Nobody had any jobs. Fuck all goes on there now. Most of the shops are boarded up.

My Mum's ONE OF 11. I'd say seven out of that 11 all moved to Manchester from Ireland, and they've congregated around a five square-mile area and none of them are leaving. Someone got shot in the face outside my mum's house about four months ago. She's oblivious to the violence. She loves it there.

HARD WORK and a fucking filthy tongue, that's what I inherited from my mum. She taught the Nineties how to swear. And what's the word, stoicism? Yeah, she was hardcore. She didn't give a fuck.

I REMEMBER ONCE AS A CHILD, the local priest came round because she hadn't brought us to mass for ages. She gave him the short shrift in the house. Words to the effect of, "What's the church ever done for me? I run my own life. These lads, they can go to church if they want." Go to fucking church? Fucking joking, man.

FROM MY DAD I GOT my love of Man City, thank fucking God, although I resented him for that up until about eight years ago. And he was a DJ in Irish social clubs, so he had a big vinyl collection. Actually, what I got from him was my utter fucking devotion to The Best Of ... Because that's all he had: The Best Of The Drifters, The Best Of This, The Best Of That.

MY OLD MAN INVENTED ROAD RAGE. When the new Ford Sierra came out it was a big thing. I remember him calling a guy in the street out of the window, "You fucking Sierra-faced bastard!" That's poetry, man.

I'M THE MIDDLE CHILD. I know a few people who are middle children and I get on great with them. They have a kind of laid-back attitude. I think there's something in that. I was very much a loner as a child and that's something that's stayed with me. I don't really need a great deal of people.

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MY BROTHER PAUL? I guess it must be weird for him but you can only surmise. He does all right. He's a DJ. When I'm on tour or when Liam's on tour he'll play in each town and we allow him to put the band's logos on his flyers. He follows me all over Europe. One thing is, though, he's not mastered the art of taking a breath in between sentences, so sentences can go on for fucking hours, to where I don't even know what he's saying, he's just talking fucking nonsense.

Paul will tell you he's a better singer than me or Liam. Make of that what you will. But he's a good lad.

—

I LAUGH when I hear people moaning about their childhoods. It's usually middle-class people. I think, "mine was worse." Mine was wrapped up in violence and drunkenness and there was no money. And still we didn't go around fucking robbing people. We stole things, we didn't rob people.

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It's preposterous to say you're working class when your back garden is bigger than the fucking street you grew up on. But it's always there. Do I feel working class? In my soul, I guess I do.

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If I was in My Late forties and struggling, I might think I'd been short-changed by society. But I wasn't upset about being on the dole. That was just the way it was. I wouldn't say dole culture in the Eighties was cool, but all my mates were on it and all my mates' dads were, too. And out of that dole-culture in the Eighties came what became known as Britpop.

—

It's A GOOD JOB I didn't have a mobile phone when I was on the dole at 17. I wouldn't be sat here today, I fucking assure you of that. I'd have spent all day watching The Beatles on YouTube, getting stoned, thinking, "This is the greatest thing of all time." Nowadays even people who are on benefits have got iPhone 6s and fucking iPads and flat-screen tellies and all that shit. And these are the people on the breadline? What the fuck, man? We didn't have anything to do so we had to invent it.

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WE COULDN'T AFFORD CARPET and it was embarrassing when you'd bring girls back. "Oh, you've got no carpet?" And I remember





"Nobody else was responsible for my success.
 I wrote the songs, I wrote the lyrics,
 I came up with the parts,
 I did the interviews. I felt so bulletproof because I did it all"

"I used to put us at number seven. It went The Beatles, the Stones, the Sex Pistols, The Who, The Kinks... six? I don't know. We were at seven."

Black wool jacket, £2,100, by Dior Homme. Black cotton shirt, £170, by Ralph Lauren Black Label. Sunglasses by Garrett Leight California Optical

coming to London for the first time and people having no carpet on the floor and it was a status symbol. And I had to go back and say to my mam, "You know in London, they don't have carpet on the floor? What they've done is polished the floorboards." "Really, why would they not have carpets?" "Fucking hell, it's cockneys. How should I know? Fucking lunatics." Still makes me laugh to this day.

2.

## "This music can't not be heard"

I'm going to say I was maybe 12 or 13. I used to get grounded a lot because I was always bunking off school and getting caught smoking and fucking glue-sniffing and all the usual Seventies, Eighties gear. And there was this guitar that was behind the back door — no one knows how it got there — and I used to play one string and then it kind of just went from there. It wasn't an instant thing and I never used to stand in front of the mirror with a tennis racket. I never thought I would become a rock star. It was just something to do while I waited for these two bozo parents downstairs to relent and let me out to get some mushrooms.

WE DIDN'T MAKE PLANS, back then. There's probably a careers channel on Sky, now: Sky School Leavers. But I always felt somewhere right in the back room of my mind: *music*. I used to go to gigs and love it and then I met one of the guys from Inspiral Carpets, who offered me a job as a roadie and I thought, "Well, that's it! My instincts were right." And I was fucking thrilled with that. And then I got fired for some reason, probably being a cunt or taking drugs.

You know what was the weirdest thing about doing my first ever gig? I'd never played guitar standing up, in my life. I'd always just played it sitting on the end of the bed. So I had to get a strap. I remember the week leading up to the gig thinking, 'What am I going to fucking do?' I just stood still. And that's where the art of Stillism came from, which Oasis mastered.

The first couple of years in Oasis I thought, "This is just a laugh." Then one night, I was in my flat in India House on Whitworth Street in Manchester, and I wrote "Live Forever". I knew enough about music to know that it was a fucking great song. I knew it! I remember taking it down

to the rehearsal room and playing it on the guitar and Bonehead going, "You've not just written that song. No fucking way." He was adamant. He was going, "No, no, no, no, no, you're fucking blagging," And then when it got to the solo there was a look around the room of like, "Fucking hell, that's great."

It was Just a case of waiting for people to come to us. Liam said, "Why haven't you sent any fucking demos out?" I'd say, "Listen, this kind of music can't not be heard by the world. It's just fucking impossible."

\_

Once I'd got the record deal my whole MO was: I'm going to London and I'm going to get involved. There's this place called Camden and I'm going there and I'm getting involved in all manner of shit. And I was just up for it. I got on the train with a holdall and I never went back. I never, ever went back. I was like, "Give it to me, I fucking want it."

I DIDN'T MAKE IT until I was 27, so I was old in rock'n'roll terms. I was very prepared to have a fucking great time.

3.

## "The stadium's going to fall over!"

METAPHORICALLY, in 1993 youth culture was dead. Acid House had petered out. The stage was set for something. And we turned up. And the people said, "Yes," and boy did we deliver. And then it just exploded.

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There is this magical moment at the start of your trip, and it only lasts for about six months until you become wealthy. It's when you're wearing the same clothes as your audience and you're in the same circumstances. And there's probably people in the crowd that are better off than you are, got a better job than you have. So it's a moment of truth. You're not a rock star. You're in a rock band but you've not yet got the supermodel and the drug habit and all that. You're just a fucking guy with a guitar.

\_

THE FIRST ALBUM is a bona fide fucking moment in culture. Nobody is ever going to fucking tell me any different. That was when we were just a gang of guys. We had fuck-all and we made this music. The second album, *Morning Glory*, if you listen to the songs, the second verse of every song is just a repeat of the first verse. But that was

our time. And I think when we were good, we were fucking great, and I think when we were bad we were still pretty fucking good.

\_

THE GOOD YEARS were from '91 to Knebworth [in 1996]. Then it levelled out. There was nowhere else to go. What do you do? It was the apex and then we made the mistake of coming off stage and going to America for six weeks when we should have come off stage at Knebworth and disappeared.

\_

AM I AWARE OF A HIERARCHY? I'm aware that Radiohead have never had a fucking bad review. I reckon if Thom Yorke fucking shit into a light bulb and started blowing it like an empty beer bottle it'd probably get 9 out of 10 in fucking *Mojo*. I'm aware of that.

\_

I used to put us at number seven. It went The Beatles, the Stones, the Sex Pistols, The Who, The Kinks... who came in at six? I don't know. We were at seven. The Smiths were in there, The Specials. Where would I put us now? I guess I'd probably put us in the top 10. We weren't as great as the greats but we were the best of the rest. We did more than The Stone Roses could fucking even fathom. We're better than The Verve: couldn't fucking keep it together for more than six months at a time. If all the greats are in the top four, we're in the bottom of the top four, we're kind of constantly fighting for fifth, just missing out. Just missing out on the top four, I'd say.

Morning Glory was slated when it came out. And then when it became the biggest thing ever — and I've been told this by two editors — they thought, "We're not going to be caught out next time." And they lauded Be Here Now, which was clearly a shit fucking album, full of fat fucking rock stars, and then they got caught out again. And they never forgave us. They were just like, "Wankers. We can't fucking get on it."

\_

I've NEVER SEEN OASIS LIVE but there couldn't have been that many better than us. I've been to Wembley to see many bands but I've never seen the entire stadium pogoing, ever, at anybody else's gig. You'd be on stage thinking, "It's going to fall over. The stadium's going to fucking fall over!"

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I had 30 to 40 kids sleeping outside my house every night, so much so that the council put in two benches, fucking bolted them to my wall. And a litter bin on a fucking side street in Primrose Hill. The neighbours went fucking ape-shit.

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We'd be partying with supermodels and all sorts. It'd be like, "We're out of cigs. Who's

gonna go to the shop?" "No way. Press are outside." So, you just go out and say to one of the kids, "Do us a fucking favour: go round the Tescos and get us 400 Benson and Hedges, can you?"

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IN THE NINETIES, all of us were high on fucking cocaine, all the time. Having it. The last party. Nobody gave a fuck.

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I HAVEN'T GOT A "My Drug Hell" story because it was fucking brilliant. [But] what happened was I started getting massive panic attacks. You think you're going to die. So I stopped. I haven't done it since '98. I did one line maybe, a couple of years after I gave up, because I was pissed and I had to sober up quickly. And I haven't touched it since. It is a shit drug.

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I MIGHT HAVE HAD MY MIDLIFE CRISIS in my thirties. I started wearing fur coats, doing loads of cocaine and thinking, "I am a rock star. Fucking get me that fur coat."
"But it's made out of rabbit."
"I don't give a fuck. Give it here."

\_

I SMOKE A BIT. And drink a bit. Too much, really. But nothing else. Even now I'll be at a party and I can sense the night takes a turn when people are off to the toilets in pairs and suddenly it's not fun any more. Everyone gets very serious.

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LIAM WAS ON THAT PROGRAMME *The Word* at 19 years of age. Left home a week later and moved in with Patsy Kensit.

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I TELL YOU WHAT I THINK ABOUT LIAM and this is just an opinion. He would fucking aggressively disagree. He was rightly put up there as this fucking huge rock star but he didn't write a note, not a word. From my perspective I don't know how comfortable I'd feel about the mania surrounding us, and you knowing in your fucking soul that you were responsible for really wearing the clothes. And that's not a dig. But when you're doing interviews about an album you've not written... I know it did his head in a little bit that he was just the singer.

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LIAM WAS A GREAT SINGER and a great frontman in a great band. At his best he was the best. I think maybe inside himself, after Knebworth, Liam thought, "You've done it now." It didn't last long, you know?

\_

The fame thing, some people it hits them hard. I flourished. I love it. I've never gone out of my way to be famous and I don't go to the opening of a fucking envelope but if somebody wants to lend me their superyacht just because I'm famous,

"Thanks very much, man." I do enjoy that side of it and you *should* fucking enjoy it.

\_

The Longer that it went on the stronger I felt because nobody else was responsible for my success: not a producer, not a fucking A&R guy, not a guy who did these videos, because they were all shit. I wrote the songs, I wrote the lyrics, I came up with the parts, I did the interviews. I felt so bulletproof because I did it all.

\_

I fucking hate whingeing rock stars. And I hate pop stars who are just... neh. Just nothing, you know? "Oh, yeah, my last selfie got 47-thousand-million likes on Instagram." Yeah, why don't you go fuck off and get a drug habit, you penis?

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FAME WAS NOT WASTED ON ANYBODY in Oasis. It certainly wasn't wasted on me and Liam. And wealth, notoriety and all that, wasn't wasted on us.

4.

# "Start with the chorus. Work backwards from that"

Someone asked me what "Champagne Supernova" is about. I was like, "Who gives a fuck what it's about?" And he's going, "But surely when you write it you must know?" On stage, two hours later, in Scotland, with an acoustic guitar, I'm playing it and there's a 15-year old kid, he's got his top off and he's singing it, crying his eyes out, and I'm thinking, "That's what it's about."

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THE CHORUS. Never mind the fucking words. Start with the chorus. Work backwards from that.

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Awopвopalooвopawopвamboom. What the does that mean? Nothing. Exactly.

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"Don't Look Back in Anger." I remember writing it in Paris on a rainy night. We had just played a strip club: our set finished, the strippers came on. We were nothing, an insignificant little band. And I remember going back to my hotel room and writing it, and thinking, "That'll be pretty good when we record it." If I'd have known that night what I know now about people playing it at fucking funerals and weddings, I'd never have finished the song. Too much pressure.

TECHNICALLY, THERE'S BETTER SONGWRITERS THAN I AM. Guardian writers will tell you that. Have other people's songs ever really touched a generation, though? Radiohead? When do people listen to them? Is it when they go out, or is it when they come in? Because I'm struggling to think.

\_

LOOK, AS SOON AS THOM YORKE Writes a song as good as fucking "Mony Mony", give us a fucking shout.

\_

ME AND MY MISSUS, we were at the Coachella festival a couple of years ago and Radiohead were headlining. We were like, "Right, let's give them one more chance. Let's go and see them." Beautiful, sunny night. We walked out through the crowd as they came on, and they were playing this post-techno: "de-de de de". We were a bit pissed. Fucking great. And then he started singing. No. Not for us. We're party people.

— Մ»

I'M NEVER GOING TO WRITE a song that connects with people as much as "Don't Look Back in Anger" has, but that doesn't stop me from going to the well every morning. I still think there's great songs out there that haven't been written yet. And I still think when I'm sitting down to finish off that song I'll come up with that line that turns it from a good song to a great song. I guess it's like any writer — not that I consider myself "a writer" because they are the fucking most boring cunts in the world — but, as a writer you surely always think that your best work is in front of you, even though I'm self-aware enough to realise it's probably fucking behind me.

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THERE'S A CERTAIN JOY IN MY SONGS where they go well with boozing.

5.

### "We'd had about 11 drummers at that point"

Oasis was Just so Fucking Massive. I'm not saying it wasn't fun because it was. We had some fucking great times — but we also had some shit times as well.

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THE LAST SIX MONTHS were fucking awful, it was excruciating. Me and Liam had a massive, massive, massive fistfight three weeks before the world tour started, and fights like that in the past would always be

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Liam, left, and Noel Gallagher, right, in May 1994, three months before the release of Oasis's debut album, Definitely Maybe. Other original Oasis members, later replaced, are in the background. From second left: bassist Paul "Guigsy" McGuigan, drummer Tony McCarroll and guitarist Paul "Bonehead" Arthurs

"Liam was a great singer in a great band. At his best he was the best. But I think maybe after Knebworth he thought, 'You've done it now.' It didn't last long, you know?"





easy to rectify but for some reason I wasn't going to let it go this time. I was just like, "Fuck this cunt." And there was an atmosphere all the way around the world.

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If I'd thought there was anything left to achieve I wouldn't have left Oasis. I made a very snap decision in the car that night in Paris: we've done it all, we're only going go round in circles now and do bigger tours and make more money and get *another* fucking drummer — we'd had about 11 drummers at that point. We sold out all the great gigs in the world: Hollywood Bowl, Madison Square Garden, Wembley fucking Stadium, City of Manchester Stadium, Hampden Park. You name it, we did it all.

\_

BY THAT STAGE I was flying separately to the rest of the band, which I have to tell you was fucking great. And Liam was sacking tour managers because he didn't like their shoes. Then he starts his own clothing label and starts dedicating songs to it on stage and I'm like, "Really, is this what it's come to?" He's modelling parkas on stage which you could buy on his website. And it's just like, "This is not for me."

\_

ALL THAT BEING SAID, we had two gigs left and I reckon if I'd had got to the end of that tour and I'd had six months off I would have just forgotten about it, got on with it. But the straw that broke the camel's back was the night in Paris and that was a fight. There's no hidden darkness. It was just a fight about fucking nonsense, just him being pissed.

\_

HE'D CANCELLED THE GIG at the V Festival and we were getting loads of shit for it in the press. And to this day, Liam thinks that I know every journalist intimately in London, like they're my mates, they all come to mine for Sunday lunch. It's amazing you've not been there! It's a great spread my missus puts on for everybody. But Liam's convinced I'm some kind of puppet-master, and he blames it all on me. And then it just escalated. It blew up. And that was it. I sat in the car and thought, "You know what, I've done enough now. Fuck it, I'm going to leave."

\_

I was being asked about a reunion five weeks after I left the band. It's a modern phenomenon. It's a modern disease. All the bands that get back together, all those ones you've mentioned [Fleetwood Mac, Led Zeppelin] they didn't have anybody in the line-up as fucking brilliant as me. What's the guitarist out of Fleetwood Mac called? Lindsay Buckingham. I can't remember him setting the world on fire. Jimmy Page? That's debatable. He's a good guitarist but

I'm not sure how many solo albums he's fucking made.

\_

IF OASIS WERE EVER TO COME BACK WE couldn't be any bigger than we'd already been. There's no kudos in us selling out three nights at Wembley because we've already fucking done seven. The Stone Roses never played gigs of that magnitude. They came back and they were bigger than they'd ever been. So it was justified.

TEN YEARS FROM NOW, if I wake up one morning and go, "You know what? I think I'm going to do it," I can guarantee you, just for spite, Liam would say, "Oh, no, I'm not keen." Because that's the way shit works.

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I CAN ONLY TELL YOU I've already got the next five years planned out. So it's not going to happen in the next five years. Who knows what circumstances might be thrown up in the future? But, certainly, it's not even on the horizon. Not even on the horizon.

6.

### "Ice cream for breakfast and liquorice for lunch"

Do you know what time My wife got in this morning? Half-six! She was out last night with her mates. I was woke up this morning with a tap on the head from my eldest. I looked at the clock and it was half-six, and he went, "She's just got in." So I told her, "I'm not doing your PR no more. I don't get any back."

\_

I know it's extremely fucking un-rock'n'roll to say this, but the person I prefer to hang out with more than anyone is my missus. She's my favourite person to go on holiday with, to go to dinner with, 12-hour lunches, go to the party. She just, yeah, she means everything to me. She's a fucking good girl.

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I FUCKING LOVE WOMEN. I much prefer hanging out with them. I remember my upbringing being pretty much my mum and her sisters, and even when we went to Ireland the men were never around. I'd much rather hang out with girls. I mean who wouldn't? Fuck me, if you've got the choice of a night out with six birds or six fucking geezers, thank you very much but I'll go with the six women. I never go on lads' nights out. Ever.

I've said to Sara many times: she wouldn't have lasted 10 minutes in the Nineties. All the scene around my house would have devoured her. She was too pretty for the Nineties. There was too much chaos and drugs and all that kind of thing. And I met her just at the right time — I'd given up drugs, my first marriage had pretty much broken down and there she was. Of all the fucking places, in Ibiza. You're supposed to have one-night stands in Ibiza, you're not supposed to get a girlfriend, far less a wife, far less two fucking children.

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SHE CAN BE A BIT OF A DITHERER. She changes her mind mid-sentence. Then again, that's like most women though, isn't it? Dithering fuckers.

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She's very funny and it goes without saying that she's gorgeous and all that. Yeah, she's top, man. She is great. And I'm looking forward to getting home today because she's going to have the fear. It's one of my favourite parts of having a relationship, is when she has the fear because I'll pounce on her like a lion — and I don't mean sexually. I'll stoke the fear for a good four or five hours before she goes to bed. And I'll be just looking at her going, "You looked like you'd exploded out of your knickers when you got in this morning." Mentally breaking her down. I'm such a cunt.

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By SHEER DEFINITION, every songwriter is a romantic. But all my efforts in that department go into songwriting. If I ever found myself walking down the street with flowers, I'd have a moment of clarity and I'd have to take them back to the garage: "Can I swap this for a Starbar, please?"

\_

ALL THE PR I DO FOR THAT WOMAN, I didn't even get a fucking birthday present last time. Fucking hell! She pulls out that one: "But you've got everything! How many more effects pedals can I buy you?" One more! One fucking more will do. One more!

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THE AMOUNT OF TIMES she'll say to me, "You couldn't give us a fucking rub there?" "No! Go to a fucking spa! I'm not massaging any fucker."

\_

SHE'S BAD COP. I'm good cop. I'd let my kids get away with murder. Sara's a bit more of a stickler for the rules. I'd let them have ice cream for breakfast. And liquorice for lunch and sit round watching telly all day. Because it's like, you're away most of the time and you can't be coming home and then laying down the law. The kids'll just think, "Who's this cunt?"

# "Who cares about One Direction? Ellie Goulding, really? Adele, what? Fame's wasted on them with their in-ear monitors and their electronic cigarettes and their fragrances they're bringing out for Christmas..."

I TELL MY KIDS A LOT: "You lucky fuckers."

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MY DAUGHTER, WHO COMES FROM A BROKEN MARRIAGE, she works in TV now, she's very fucking into it. I was quite lucky with music, I latched onto something that I loved and I became obsessed with it. If those two lads find that thing then it's just up to me to steer them, guide them towards it. But I'm not going to overthink it, either. I mean, they'll probably both end up working for me. Donovan'll be the tour manager and Sonny will be head of security. I'd love that.

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The amount of rock stars' kids that make something of themselves you could probably count on one hand. We'll find out, I guess. But if my lads never lift a finger for the rest of their lives, on my deathbed I'll say to them, "Fucking good on you."

7

## "The bottle's going to be a massive toe"

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT'S WRONG. Fame's wasted on these cunts today. Bar Kanye. You watch him on the MTV Awards and you think, "You can fucking stay, you're alright."

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Does anybody give a fuck about what any of these current pop stars are up to? Who gives a shit what fucking One Direction do? Cocksuckers, all of them in rehab by the time they're 30. Who gives a shit what Ellie Goulding is up to? Really? Adele, what? Blows my fucking mind. It blows my fucking mind. Nobody cares! Fame's wasted on them, with their fucking in-ear monitors and their electronic cigarettes. And their fragrances that they're bringing out for Christmas. You fucking dicks.

\_

My fragrance? Oh it's coming, it's coming. Toe-Rag it's going to be called. And the bottle's going to be a massive toe.

THERE ARE NO ROCK'N'ROLL PEOPLE ANYMORE. What people think of as rock'n'roll now is you can buy The Rolling Stones' 1972 tour T-shirt in Topman.

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This new generation of Rock Stars, they look great: Alex Turner, Miles Kane, the guys from Royal Blood. They've got the fucking skinny jeans and the boots, and all that eyeliner. I've got a cat that's more rock'n'roll than all of them put together. Pigeons? Rips their fucking heads off.

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I GO BACK TO THIS: fame is fucking wasted on these people. The new generation of rock stars, when have they ever said anything that made you laugh? When have they ever said anything you remember? People say, "They're interesting." Interesting! That's a word that's crept in to music: "Yeah, man. Have you heard the new Skrillex record?" "No." "Yeah, man. It's really interesting." I don't want interesting! Rock'n'roll's not about that. To me, it's about fucking utter gobshites just being fucking headcases. Well, not headcases. But what I want, genuinely, is somebody with a fucking drug habit, who's not Pete Doherty. Do you know what I mean?

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RECORD COMPANIES NOW can sell a billion Ed Sheeran downloads tomorrow morning. They don't want someone like Ian Brown in their offices, or Liam, or Bobby Gillespie, or Richard Ashcroft, or me. They want professionals. That's what it's become now.

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I GUARAN-FUCKING-TEE YOU THIS:
The Stone Roses never mentioned "career" in any band meetings. Ever. Or Primal Scream, or The Verve. Oasis certainly never mentioned it. I bet it's mentioned a lot by managers and agents now: "Don't do that, it's bad for your career." "What? Fuck off!" Like when we went to the Brits and we'd won all those awards and we didn't play. The head of the Brits said, "This'll ruin your career." Fucking, wow. I say to the guy, "Do you know how high I am? You know who's going to ruin my career? Me, not you. Bell-end. More Champagne. Fuck off."

Ten years ago, I said we'd be the last. I just felt it. I felt that story, the poor boys done good, which was retold from Elvis through The Beatles — we won't mention The Stones because they're posh kids — Sex Pistols, The Smiths, The Stone Roses, I felt at the time we were the end. And I've been proved right. And I don't like that. I mean I love being proved right but not in that case.

\_

I GET THIS FROM LITTLE SPOTTY FUCKING HERBERTS WITH GUITARS, all the time, "Oh, it's really difficult. Everyone's always going on about there are no great bands but there is." My argument is this: are you fucking telling me that somewhere out there, undiscovered by the record industry, is the greatest band in the world? With all the amount of exposure that you can get by clicking on your own phone? Fuck off.

\_

ROCK'N'ROLL IS ALL ABOUT freedom and honesty. Freedom of thought, freedom of expression. You have a duty to be honest.

—

SOMEBODY SAID TO ME, "Have you been to Saint Laurent recently?" Which I have, by the way. And I was like, "No, why?" "Oh, you should, their new collection is so rock'n'roll." And I was like, "Do you even know what that means? You mean it's clothes rock stars would wear?" "Well, yeah." "And what are they?" "Well, you know, it's just..." "Well, I'm a rock star. And I'm wearing these fucking clothes."

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HARRY STYLES has got nothing to say for himself — nothing. "You alright, mate?" "Uhhh." That's it.

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It's no coincidence that all the big people from the Nineties lasted. I've been in festivals all summer — every one of them has been headlined by someone from the Nineties. That's why Kate Moss has transcended eras. No one's taken her place.

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EVERYBODY'S OUT TO PLEASE *The Guardian*. And that's the wrong attitude.

I know people who live for their reviews.

I once asked somebody how their new album was going, they said, "Fucking great.

### "People see something in what Oasis did that maybe we still don't see. I've had people outside crying. Still to this day, crying. I think people put something onto us that they wanted to see in themselves"

I've only got one bad review." Who gives a fuck? "Only got one bad review." Fucking hell, really? Shit, Jesus. Here's your second.

\_

You're not seriously telling me that anyone is going to be listening to Foals in 12 years. Is anybody going to be fucking begging for Hot Chip to get back together in 22 years? I don't fucking think so.

8

## "You can't download spirit"

I'M NEVER GOING TO SELL OUT Wembley Stadium on my own. Oasis could do 15 nights at the drop of a fucking hat but that's not what drives me now. I'm driven to make what I do now the best that it can be.

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I won't say a word to an audience for two hours if I can't be fucking bothered. If you don't like it then don't come next time.

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THE GIG WILL NEVER DIE because you can't download it. You can't download spirit. And, so, for the likes of me who persevered from an early age to play the fucking guitar and write songs and practice and practice and practice, I'll be fine. God help fucking Zayn Malik.

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Money is like drugs. What drugs do to you is whatever you are in your core, they just magnify. If you're depressed, drugs will magnify that. If you're a worrier, drugs will magnify that. If you're paranoid, drugs will magnify that. Same with money. Now, I'm none of those things. I'm a party person. I live in the fucking moment. I have no conscience. I don't fucking care. I look after me and my family. That's it. So money is fucking great. And do you know what the best thing about it is? I earned every fucking penny. I didn't win it in the lottery. If I hadn't have written those songs, I wouldn't

be where I am today. That's the bottom line. So, I fucking enjoy it as much as I can.

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One of the things my missus says, "You're a fucking bizarre individual." She says, "You just don't give a fuck, do you?"

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PEOPLE ARE WARY ABOUT WHAT THEY SAY NOW, for fear of social media. I pity people who fucking practice in the court of public opinion. When people would interview me I didn't give a fuck. And it wasn't studied not-giving-a-fuck. [Mimsy voice] "Oh no, I don't give a fuck." I genuinely didn't care what people thought and I still to this day don't care what people think of me. There's a bit of my brain that's missing.

\_

Chris Martin is a friend of mine. That fucking guy can write a tune. And he's hilarious, by the way. We were out one night having dinner, me and my missus, him and his missus, and he ended up banging his hand on the table, shouting at me: "Why do you think it's so cool not to give a fuck?" Because he does give a fuck. About everything. I might have been making some disparaging comment about fucking Madonna or someone, and he was like, "I just can't believe you can be like that." And I was like, "Fucking believe it, man, because I can't believe you can be like that."

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EVERY LUDICROUS THING I'VE EVER SAID, I accepted the consequences because I don't think I've ever said, "Oh, it was taken out of context, that." Fucking wankers say that.

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I DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD. I don't believe there's an all-seeing Somebody guiding the universe because if there was, clearly, there wouldn't be such a thing as Isis. And I don't mean the Bob Dylan song. In that sense, I'm a man of science. The Big Bang, that all sounds a lot more plausible to me.

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How do I explain my success? I think that the people see something in what I do and what we did that maybe we still don't see. I've had people outside crying. Still to

this day, crying. And I still don't understand that. So, I think people put something onto us that they wanted to see in themselves.

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It's NICE TO DO THINGS LIKE THIS from time to time because I never really talk about it with anybody else. Nobody else was there. I'm the last man standing.

\_

When I talk to Weller, he's just slagging people off because he just fucking hates everyone. Bono, though, he's great at summing things up. He said to me, "As long as your shit's great, you don't have to be." I thought, "That's so true. I don't have to be anything other than myself, as long as the songs are great. And if the songs are great, no one's really fucking interested about me so I can just do what the hell I want."

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WHEN YOU MAKE MISTAKES is when you think that it's you that's great and that anything you do must be great by definition, because it's you who's doing it. Not true. I learned that lesson very fucking quickly.

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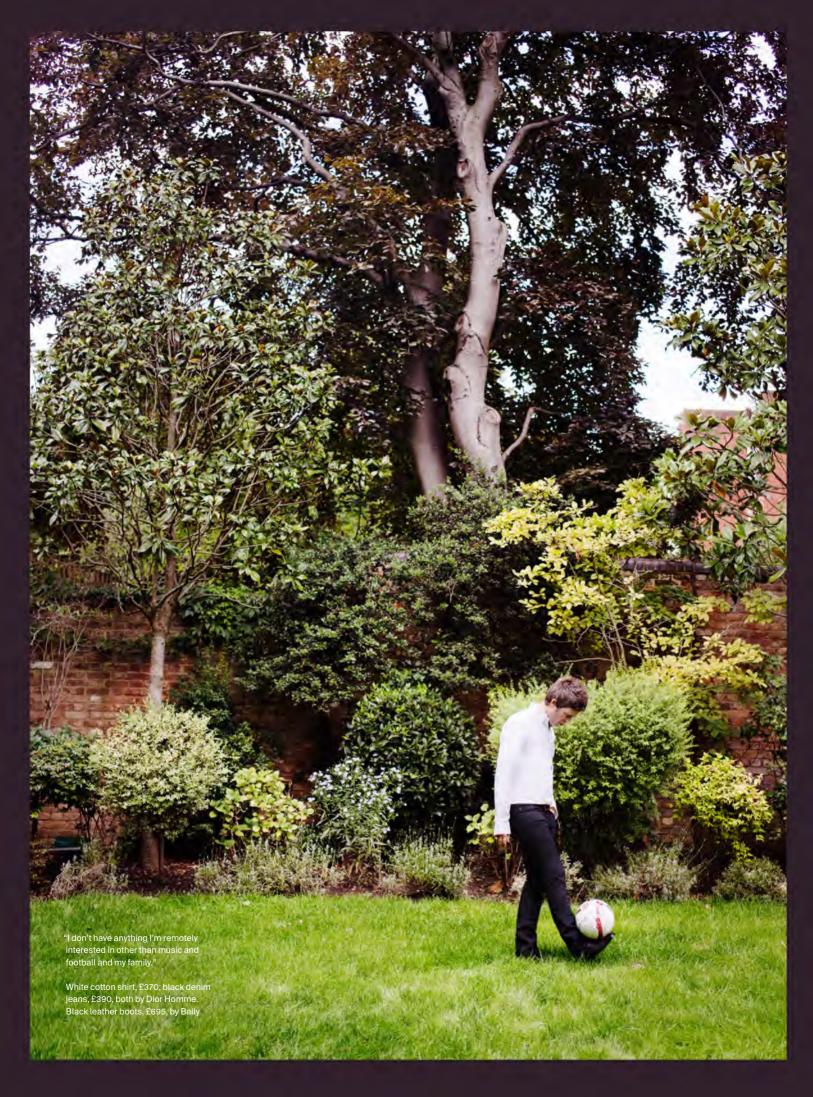
I DON'T CHASE IT ANYMORE. I used to write constantly. Weller said to me one night, "Look, just don't." It went away from him for years. I said, "How'd you deal with that?" He said, "Just don't chase it. If it's going to come back it'll come back. And if it doesn't come back, would you be happy if you never wrote another song?" I think if I never wrote another song I could look back and think that some of the songs that I wrote really made a difference. They didn't change the world but they made a difference to people. People fucking love those songs. So I would be happy.

—

RETIRING? I don't know what I'd do. It's quite sad, really. I don't have anything else that I'm remotely interested in other than music and football and my family. And that's it.

-

I'M PROUD OF THREE THINGS, maybe four things. To get to this age and not have dyed my hair is a major achievement. No earrings. No tattoos. And no motorbike.







At the height of the Swinging Sixties, a young author exploded onto the London pop scene with a clutch of hit thrillers starring the hash-smoking, dandyish, hipster spy Philip McAlpine, a cooler, loucher, more switched-on James Bond for the Beatles generation. Fêted like a rock star, with riches to match, the writer suddenly vanished from sight. Fifty years on, whatever happened to Adam Diment?

## "First, my name. Philip McAlpine."

The Dolly, Dolly Spy (1967)

Mysteries are only mysteries if you want them to be. Before I started looking into his story, I'd known Adam Diment purely by Wikipedia reputation, as the wildly successful literary wonder boy whose best-selling Sixties spy novels saw him briefly become Britain's biggest publishing phenomenon. In 1967, on the strength of a single unpublished manuscript, the 23-year-old landed a six-book deal, with what was (at the time) the largest advance ever paid to a first-time author. Promoted more like a pop star than a novelist, Fleet Street dubbed Diment "the biggest thing in the entertainment world since The Beatles". Dressed in the latest Mr Fish threads and draped with girls, his face popped up everywhere from Sunday supplements to the sides of double-decker buses, tagged with the helpful tagline, "You Don't Listen to Adam Diment, You Read Him".

On its release, the *Financial Times* labelled Diment's 1967 debut, *The Dolly, Dolly Spy,* "a King's Road mini-thriller, dressed to kill": translated into 13 languages, from Iceland to Brazil to Japan, it sold one million copies within the year. It was followed in rapid succession by *The Great Spy Race* ("utterly preposterous but regrettably unputdownable", *The Observer*), and *The Bang Bang Birds* ("his creator's best effort yet. James Bond — pish! That's strictly for birds that don't go bang-bang", *The Times Literary Supplement*).

The Bond comparisons were endless, and inevitable. Arriving two years after Ian Fleming's death, Diment was perfectly timed to grab

the 007 mantle. But there was little common ground between the shaken-not-stirred Bond and Diment's anti-hero, Philip McAlpine, a wisecracking, pot-smoking, Carnaby Street-clad charmer, black-mailed into working for a vague subdivision of MI6 by the pint-sized, memorably Machiavellian Rupert Quine, an employer with ethics as outrageous as his psychedelic wardrobe.

"I thought he was hugely cool," recalls crime writer Peter James, one of McAlpine's many fans. "James Bond was a fantasy figure, remote, from a different world, almost a different planet. But somehow Philip McAlpine was more accessible. He felt like someone who might have been in class with me at school, the handsome hunk that everyone admires and secretly wishes they could be."

Tall, blond, and fashionably flippant, McAlpine was — as his creator cheerfully confessed — a lightly fictionalised version of Diment himself. And in an era when most writers stayed safely within the photos on their books' dust jackets, Diment's flamboyant image and headline-friendly sex-and-drugs soundbites became as much part of his success as anything he actually wrote. From the outside, the young author seemed to lap up the fame and money McAlpine's success bought him. But then, after 1971's Think Inc ("a fast and very hip read", The Sunday Telegraph), Adam Diment simply walked away. He left behind a trail of what-might-have-beens; a contract for two further novels; an aborted Hollywood deal, which would have made McAlpine the next big movie spy; and repeated admissions of his yearning for a more serious literary career. (In one of his first interviews, he'd groaned "I don't want to be writing McAlpine when I'm 27!") As time went on, the media barrage slumped into a scattered string of rumoured sightings, in a succession of increasingly vague, unrelentingly exotic destinations. In 1975, when The Observer ran a short piece titled "Whatever Happened to Adam Diment?", the answer was succinct: "Diment now lives in Zurich, shunning publicity, and has no plans to write a new book."

Nothing's changed 40 years on: no new books, no publicity and silence from the author. But unlike so many of his contemporaries from that boom decade of British spy fiction — Gavin Lyall, Adam Hall, James Leasor, John Gardner, Peter Townend — Diment's star has refused to fade. He's regularly credited in dictionaries and thesauruses, for his colourful Sixties' vocabulary; "dolly", "chaver", "feel up", "acid-head", "go down a bomb". Online, there's a healthy trade in old McAlpine paperbacks, with their distinctive guns-and-girls covers, including catchily-translated international versions like En Hip, Hip Agent, Les Poupées Bang Bang and Püppchen, Püppchen.

Over the decades, there have been repeated (but failed) attempts by publishers to gain permission to reprint the novels, and regular tributes to their influence from successive generations of thriller writers. And so, long after his name should have faded into obscurity, people still wonder what happened to Adam Diment.

## "Well-dressed secret agents are definitely wearing cloaks this spring."

The Great Spy Race (1968)

"IT'S JUST EXTRAORDINARY how all these voices from the Sixties have come out of the woodwork!" grins Rob Baker when we first meet. A former television producer, Baker now runs the modern history blog Another Nickel in the Machine, and is baffled and delighted in equal parts to find himself caught up in the Diment saga. Six years ago, he published a succinct overview of the story, "The Disappearance Of The Author Adam Diment". It drew together most of the

information then available (articles, reviews, book covers and magazine photo shoots, plus two anonymous letters written to the Bank of England in 1969, linking Diment to shadowy allegations of money laundering and drug dealing.)

It's one of many similar pieces about Diment to have appeared on the internet, but Baker's piece is noteworthy for its comments section, which has mushroomed into a Diment shrine. There are tributes from those who loved the McAlpine books at the time and those who have only just stumbled across them; memories from those who knew Diment in his DB5-driving Kings' Road heyday or who claim to have met him later in Rome, Ibiza, or Nepal; and theories from those who speculate he blew his mind on drugs years ago and those who insist he is alive and well (and still writing.) Taken as a whole, what they show is that Diment's story is a conspiracy theorist's wet dream: an absent author, a parade of gorgeous girls, an abandoned film deal and a hint of blackmail, soused in a nostalgic haze of sex and hash. All the ingredients for a perfect Swinging Sixties thriller, actually, but few of the facts.

Frederick Adam Diment was born in Weymouth in 1943 (as he explained to a bemused American reporter, he never used his first name "because no swinger is called Fred.") His parents were farmers, first in Dorset and later at Crowhurst, East Sussex. As a teenager, he studied at Lancing College, a grandly Victorian public school which lists Evelyn Waugh, Tom Sharpe, Christopher Hampton and David Hare (the latter two overlapped with Diment) among its literary alumni. There's no evidence to suggest Diment's future path in the school archives, though; his record there is unhelpfully brief; "Entered Second's Lent '57. GCE: O 6, A 2. Bronze Medallion. Art Prize for Drawing '61. Cpl CCF RAF. XL Geog. To Circencester Agricultural College."

Looking back, agricultural college seems like an unlikely detour for an author-in-waiting. And halfway through his course, Diment dropped out. He moved to London, where he roomed with another ex-Lancing boy, the future lyricist Tim Rice. A spattering of mentions in Rice's autobiography provides most of what's now known of Diment's pre-McAlpine life; he was there as Diment ambled through a haphazard succession of short-lived jobs, producing 14 different book manuscripts on the side, all rejected by publishers. He was there when Diment moved to Fulham, to a flat owned by James Leasor, whose 1965 espionage thriller Passport To Oblivion was on the way to becoming one of the decade's top sellers. Leasor's example seems to have spurred Diment on; he speed-read his way through the assorted works of Ian Fleming and Len Deighton, and hammered out manuscript 15, The Runes of Death, in just 17 days. Famously, the story would be published without a single change, save the title, which his publishers switched for the far more of-the-moment The Dolly, Dolly Spy. Lucy Abelson, then a features writer for teen mag Rave, interviewed Diment for the book's release. "Terry Hornett, Rave's editor, had a real talent for spotting what was next, and what was going to be hot. And we never usually covered books, but he was adamant that Adam Diment was going to be the next big thing." The piece set the tone for all the interviews Diment would give over the period of his success: languid, cheerfully controversial and disarmingly disparaging about the books themselves. "Personally," he told Abelson, "I'd call them competent junk!"

It wouldn't matter. From the start, the main selling point would lie less in the novels' breezy, rapid-fire prose than in the blurred lines between McAlpine and Diment himself. He obligingly posed for photos in play-spy mode; juggling machine guns, piloting Tiger Moths and driving sports cars, cosying up to girls and rolling joints. As it turned out, pot would be the fundamental ingredient of both McAlpine and Diment's backstories; the counter-culture twist that set them firmly apart from Fleming and the sober-suited Bond. "Grass Smoker's Best Seller Makes Him Lots of Green", ran

one typical American headline, while an Italian magazine excitably trumpeted his publisher's boast, "Adam Diment Writes 750 Words an Hour with the Help of Hash". Diment's parents, endearingly, took their son's notoriety in stride. "The youngsters like to talk about these things more than they do them," his father sighed when *Life* magazine showed up on the family's Crowhurst doorstep. Whatever the case, Diment's story caught the world's attention. But looking back at the media frenzy decades later, Tim Rice would qualify his former flatmate's success: "Someone had to be the first dope-head novelist and [Adam] was lucky it happened to be him."

"I had been pretty sure Quine had sold me out before the general mentioned his lousy name. The preening, scrofulous little stoat had come up to his previous record.

'And what price did you offer.

'And what price did you offer that miserable ponce for his very best, top-notch, little whore?'"

The Bang Bang Birds (1968)

"I FEAR I WILL DISAPPOINT YOU with my knowledge and memory of Adam Diment, he was not around for very long, as you know. However, there is no doubt that his public persona as a Sixties 'swinger' was created entirely by Desmond Elliott, my boss." That's the first line of my correspondence with one Carolann Smith-Dorrien, and the first hint that Diment might, in fact, have been as much a work of fiction as the spy he'd invented. After meeting Baker, I'd worked my way through people who'd commented on his blog, asking how they knew Diment and what they remembered of him. It was slow work but gradually people began to respond, among them Smith-Dorrien, who, as a graduate in the late Sixties, became personal assistant to the man responsible for launching Diment upon the world.

Desmond Elliott was a London publishing legend, a tiny, redheaded Irishman with a colourful taste in suits (an unforgettable apparition by any standards), with all-too-tempting echoes of Diment's red-haired spymaster, Rupert Quine. He'd scored his first hit with Leslie Thomas' *The Virgin Soldiers*, and would go on to represent best-selling authors Jilly Cooper, Richard Doyle and Penny Vincenzi. In the mid-Sixties, he paired Tim Rice with the young composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, and spent the ensuing years trying to get the duo's novice efforts onto the stage. But while progress stalled on that front, Diment persuaded Rice to show Elliott *The Runes of Death*.

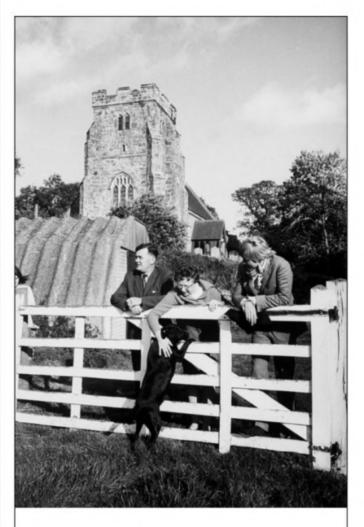
"I remember Adam coming to meet Desmond in Duke Street, where we had a tiny office above the tailor Welsh & Jeffries," says Smith-Dorrien. "Adam was tall and blond, and reasonably good looking. And he was malleable. I'm sure Desmond said something along the lines of, 'I can do something with you, if you'll allow me to'." Diment was, it seems, open to the suggestion; he grew his hair long, bought a Bond-worthy Aston Martin and, in Rice's words, "began to

act permanently stoned. Elliott swept him off to the King's Road, to kit him out as a foppish Regency dandy".

"Desmond thought the Americans would fall for it," Smith-Dorrien laughs. He was right; they did.

This svengali twist on the Diment story is echoed by the too-perfectly-named-to-be-true Suzie Mandrake, who turns up in *The Dolly, Dolly Spy* as Veronica, an early McAlpine love interest whose whirlwind career (society deb, cave dweller, artist's model, adult film starlet) is worthy of a novel in its own right. Mandrake first got to know Diment when they worked together at advertising agency Connell, May & Stevenson. "I honestly think Adam was still quite green and a country boy when we first met," she recalls. "We became best friends outside of office hours, and Adam used to hang around with my boyfriend and myself, which I think introduced him to the Chelsea lifestyle. His 'new romantic' look didn't really start until the fame and publicity shoots, up to then he was quite 'anorak'. I would say it was definitely orchestrated/encouraged by Desmond Elliott. It was Chelsea, but even then quite extreme — the only other people I saw dressed like that were the likes of Jagger."

Mandrake tagged along with Elliott and Diment on their head-line-grabbing 1967 coast-to-coast US book tour. "We had people spitting at us in the streets there because of his bottle-green suits and frilly shirts," she says. "Wasn't this when the Bond books were so popular, and beginning to be turned into films? I think Adam's books were a kind of affectionate, more hip, spoof on those. He certainly became a superstar, and loved it at the time."



Adam Diment aged 23 with his parents in a photo shoot for Life magazine, 1967

#### Investigation



Top: during the shoot for Life, Diment was interviewed by British actor David Hemmings.

Above: with model Suzie Mandrake, centre, and artist Timothy Whidborne, left

**Top:** smoking a kif pipe with Mandrake for Life. **Above:** with aspiring singer Victoria Brooke in a Tiger Moth biplane, 1967

"The tour was a great success." Smith-Dorrien agrees. "Desmond stayed in the background, but you can be sure he told Adam exactly what he should say, and how to dress."

Back in London, there was a frenzy of press and a launch party for The Dolly, Dolly Spy held, inevitably, at Dolly's nightclub in St James's. There were nationwide jaunts, to present regatta prizes and judge beauty pageants (Southport's Miss English Rose and Liverpool's Miss Selfridges Personality Girl both received the benefit of Diment's expert eye). There were even rumours of McAlpine toiletries and clothing, a logical step for a spy who was such a dedicated follower of fashion. And, of course, there were the girls, co-opted by Elliott into starring alongside Diment in publicity shots: Victoria Brooke, who later married a Getty; Camille, a glamorous Cuban émigré who disappeared from view even more thoroughly than Diment; and, briefly, Mandrake. She and Diment dated, but it didn't last. "Mainly," she laughs, "because his parents were so horrified that he'd expect them to meet a girl who would appear in bed with him, never mind smoking a hookah, for Life."

The Life photos also show Diment deep in conversation with British actor David Hemmings. Soon after, Elliott brokered a deal with United Artists and producer Stanley Canter to make a film of The Dolly, Dolly Spy, with Hemmings (then riding high on the success of Blow-Up) as McAlpine. It was an obvious move; the first five Bond films had all been box office smashes, and a whole slew of copycat movies were being rushed through to cash on the spy boom, Licensed to Kill, Our Man Flint, Agent 8 3/4, OK Connery, Modesty Blaise, Come Spy With Me and Where the Spies Are (an adaptation of Leasor's Passport to Oblivion) among them. Filming was set to begin in late 1968 and with preparations underway, Diment continued to capitalise on his success. He rattled out two more novels within the year, became a magazine columnist and chat-show regular, made a cameo appearance in the cult aliensin-Swinging-London movie Popdown, and made a publicity tour of Europe.

But there were questions; for many journalists, Adam Diment was too good to be true. "They could practically enter this kid at Cannes," the *Chicago Tribune*'s reviewer sniped. In England, the *New Statesman* noted: "Because of the way the books have been sold, some people seem to imagine the Diment phenomenon is like those pop music and fashion happenings that are thought up by a committee of (usually middle-aged) trend-spotting entrepreneurs who find a pretty face to hang the clothes on, or to open and shut the mouth in time with the music, or whatever it may be." The article's author was closer than he knew. Fifty years later, Lucy Abelson seems almost relieved to discover the Diment phenomenon was part-fabricated. "Oh, I *thought* it was a bit off. I was quite skeptical about it all, to be honest; that he could dash off these thrillers in weeks, and that he'd suddenly got this three-book-deal out of nowhere."

To acknowledge Elliott's role in the affair isn't to detract from Diment's success or, indeed, from the writing itself. But it explains, at least in part, why he might have walked away from it all. "He was quite flip," Mandrake reflects, "but there was an underlying need to be a serious thinker and if he did delight in his fame when it was happening, it soon palled. I don't quite know how to put this, but there was an almost childlike naivety in his desire for, and enjoyment of, the outward trappings of fame — the Aston Martin, the clothes. But still, in the end, it wasn't quite enough."

Looking back, it's perhaps not hard to speculate why the lustre of success might have faded. After all, the young writer was dealing with the consequences of having created not one, but two imaginary characters: Philip McAlpine and Adam Diment.

### "You've been reading too many crime stories," she said.

Think Inc (1971)

#### As it turns out, Adam Diment isn't hard to find at all.

Despite all the fevered speculation over the years, he never actually vanished in the Lord Lucan or Agatha Christie sense. This is the information age, after all, and the skeleton of his life (like all our lives) is only a Google search away; age, marriage, children, address. It doesn't take long to establish he's alive and well, and that he has simply chosen, whenever the matter has arisen, not to respond to any queries connected with his former fame. When I contact his friends and family, I'm met with loyal silence and courteous refusal. Agents send regretful emails: "Tim [Rice] would rather not do this without Adam Diment's permission and he cannot get hold of him right now"; David Hare "advises he didn't really know Adam Diment, but that Tim Rice is probably best placed to help"; Jilly Cooper "has only a very vague recollection of Mr Diment".

But Diment's not been forgotten by the wider world. Current British thriller writers Jeremy Duns, Tom Cain and Adrian Magson are vocal in their admiration for his writing. "I was still in my teens and broke," says Magson, recalling how he found *The Dolly, Dolly Spy* in a south London swap-shop, "so, I must have liked the blurb and the title as much as the swap price. It was new, it was refreshing and more in tune with the feeling at the time. I loved the fact that McAlpine was anti-authoritarian, a real rebel, and young enough not to care, but with expertise enough to get himself out of trouble. There was also a touch of dark humour, which I liked. McAlpine was of my generation, which made me feel more in tune with his character."

Duns, a more recent convert, says, "I think they're very underrated. The marketing at the time sold them as a cool alternative to boring, middle-aged James Bond, and Diment was presented almost as a stand-in for his character. I think that meant people took them less seriously and they were largely forgotten as a result, consigned to a drawer marked 'novelty act'. There are certainly Austin Powers elements to them, but they're also very taut, tightly-plotted, well-written thrillers."

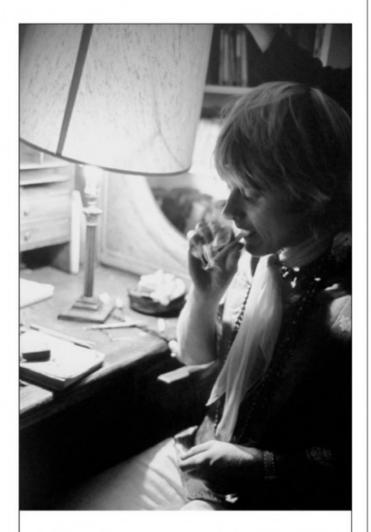
Duns hits on another key aspect of the novels' appeal. "Despite the marketing on the sex, drugs and rock'n'roll, the books are rather down to earth." He has a point. Unlike 007, McAlpine is endearingly human; he cries when a girl betrays him, moans about his weight and tucks into tinned soup after hearty sex romps. His dolly birds are Bond-movie gorgeous, but come with cosy middle-England names like Veronica, Patsy, Josy, Steph and Marianne. His writing is as compelling when describing the mundane — the grey murk of midwinter London, the monotony of office life — as it is when McAlpine decamps to a tropical island or a Swedish orgy. And it's hard to imagine 007 refusing to use a tracking device, as McAlpine does, by protesting, "You look such a bloody nit when the thing starts up on the top deck of the bus."

When it comes to picking favourites, Magson, Duns and Peter James all plump for *The Dolly, Dolly Spy*, the record-smashing debut hailed by *The New York Times* as "one of the funniest of all anti-spy novels". But the one that stays longest on my mind is *Think Inc*, the series' stark finale. Written over years instead of weeks, as Diment drifted away from the Kings Road scene to Italian villas and Indian ashrams, it marries the best of Diment's writing — exuberant pace, sudden gear-shifts into icily efficient prose, startling flashes of unexplained violence — to a cold-eyed new mood. The novel starts in

the aftermath of an international operation gone badly awry. After a tense showdown with Quine, McAlpine is cut loose and, avoiding an assassination attempt, he bids a dry-eyed farewell to Swinging London and goes on the run. Wandering through Europe, he joins an international crime gang and falls unsentimentally in love, or something like it. It's a story without hope, each chapter hammering another nail in the coffin of Diment's "switched-on spy". It ends on a bleak, tantalising cliffhanger, with McAlpine alone, under attack, out of lives and luck.

Published with little of the media fanfare of his earlier books, *Think Inc* was only a modest success. In *The Spectator*, Auberon Waugh sniffed, "Perhaps it is too much to expect a thriller to have a theme, or any particular purpose. But he really should concentrate more on thrilling." Few, by then, cared about the author's slide away from fame, apart from Eric Hiscock, a Fleet Street columnist who'd been early to spot *The Dolly, Dolly Spy*'s potential, and who provided the perfect epitaph to its author's brief, brilliant career: "Diments are not, it seems, forever."

There are glimpses, here and there, of Adam Diment's after-life. Sebastian Baker, a London acquaintance, ran into him in Ibiza in the early Seventies, and believes Diment was on his way to study psychology at UCLA. "Adam was a phenomenon, you know," he says. "The Dolly, Dolly Spy was a really big deal when it came out. But I was impressed that he had kept himself together through that time and, more than anything, in the fact he was able to walk away from it all." By the time *The Observer* published its "where is he now?" piece,



Much like his fictional alter ego Philip McAlpine, Adam Diment enjoyed smoking a joint, 1967

Diment had moved on to Zurich, the Aston Martin was replaced by a battered Fiat and the role of celebrity author succeeded by that of editor at a publishing company specialising in psychology. His last piece of writing (to my knowledge) dates from there — a decidedly un-thrilling introduction to the firm's latest offerings.

Two years later, American backpacker Clay Caughman met Diment in a remote Nepalese hotel, where they co-existed for a time. "We were just really, really quick friends. Adam's room was next door to mine, and he had a little portable Remington Underwood. He typed every morning, and then this ganja guy would come by and sell us weed every afternoon. We talked a lot, mainly about writing. And he was still living off the proceeds of *The Great Spy Race*, I remember that!" But when Suzie Mandrake saw him in London at the end of the Seventies, those funds appeared to have dried up. "We'd already lost touch. I was studying painting by then; he pulled up beside me at a bus stop as I was going from one class to another, and said he was working as a minicab driver."

After that, no-one admits to hearing from Diment for decades. Then, about ten years ago, traces begin to reappear: Lucy Abelson ran across him at a writers' conference in Winchester. "It sort of stuck in my mind, because people came out of his session very upset. My memory is that he was quite fiercely critical of some of the writing produced by ladies who attended his lectures — so much so that one or two were almost reduced to tears — with the result that he was not subsequently invited back."

Around the same time, Canadian Hugh Harrison met Diment in a bar in Cambodia, and asked, in the years of friendship that followed, most of the questions any interviewer might have hoped for. "He certainly wasn't prone to bragging," Harrison says. "But he must have touched on the fact that he'd written some books at some point books he'd said, rather dismissively, had enjoyed considerable popularity at one time. Later, after having finally discovered the circumstances of Adam's brief celebrity on my own, I asked him why he stopped. I know he wrote at least one more book, and I believe he has numerous others in various stages of development. But the problem is, publishers aren't interested in the subjects he's written about and he's not interested in selling his soul... However, I think I can state with confidence that should Adam find a publisher ready to print and promote the manuscripts he stuffed in a shoebox a long time ago, I'm sure he would be more than happy to put his support behind the reprint and distribution of a suitable quantity of the Sixties spy novels."

Others aren't so sure. Adam Jezard, a *Financial Times* commissioning editor who loved the McAlpine novels as a youngster, never forgot them or their author. "As I grew older, the books disappeared, and I became more interested. I finally made an attempt to track Adam down about ten years ago, and eventually made contact with him through his father, who was still alive then. Adam came to the phone and said he wasn't interested in what had happened in his past." Jezard sighs. "It's rather sad, really. A whole generation of boys grew up reading those books. This is just one story that isn't going to have an ending."

The right ending seems to be to track down Diment. I contact his younger brother Nicholas, who responds pleasantly and honestly. "Adam's a bit reclusive these days and doesn't enjoy interviews or articles. However, if I can be of any help with any particular information you can but ask. I'm not saying I'll be free to answer but you can try!" When I broach visiting their childhood home, Nicholas' tone stiffens: "I don't much like the idea of you snooping around at Crowhurst. Snooping is not a word you might choose but what do you hope to find out there?"

Snooping. Not a word I would choose, but not one I can avoid, either. What do I hope to find? It's a reasonable question, and one I've been avoiding ever since starting to write this story. Adam Diment, the man, walked away from Adam Diment, the author, four decades ago and has

never given any hint of wanting to change his mind. But we don't deal well with missing jigsaw pieces, in this all-access world; there's always another combination of search words to input, always another route around the problem. And on the short train journey from London to the village where Diment now lives, I've rehearsed all the reasons he might, just might, change his mind. Perhaps there's more to his story to be told, more than the simple intersection of ambition, opportunity, marketing and spot-on timing everyone else remembers. Perhaps, if nothing else, it might simply put an end to the curiosity, to having your past endlessly resurrected. And it might even be a relief, after so much silence, to finally talk. What harm can it do to ask?

Diment's house slants off the brow of a long hill, just past the line where commuter-belt hedges and soaring trees give way to open countryside. Over the past three months, on Google Earth, I've scrolled past it time and again. But in reality it comes up suddenly, without warning. It looks smaller than I thought it would, a huddle of chimneys and gables, and windows so small they seem designed to keep light out, not let it in. There's no sound in the wide, empty landscape, no motion, no sign of life, just rolling folds of fields, and a soft sky. The garden is a small, flat plot of dull green, split by a single line of paving slabs. An upended wheelbarrow lies next to the cottage door; two slim, rusting swords hang on the wall alongside. The windows are dark. But the front door is unexpectedly, startlingly ajar.

I knock, knuckles scraping against the peeling timber, the noise cracking through the still air. After a few minutes, I knock again, rapping nervously and then loudly, and then calling into the hallway. "Mr Diment?" No answer. Minutes pass. I could simply walk in to this seemingly empty house full of possible answers. Diment's either out or away or, if he's actually in, is somewhere out of sight, waiting for me to leave. But then, out on the road, there's a sudden roar as the waiting taxi driver revs his engine. The silence breaks and with it the spell; I'm standing, uninvited, on a stranger's doorstep.

Back in London, I look at an article that trails off into a non-ending, about an author who refuses to reappear. Months in, Adam

Diment's no closer than he was at the start. Many of those in his story, like Desmond Elliott, David Hemmings and film producer Stanley Canter, are dead. And those still alive aren't talking. Adam Diment is now in his early seventies; the version of him that exists is a half-century old cartoon. And beyond that blurry Austin Powers persona, there are only a handful of half-views of the real man: a precocious, confident schoolboy, popular but withdrawn; an ambitious writer-in-waiting; an overnight sensation who lived his dream in front of the cameras and went home to the flat he shared with his brother; the world-wandering recluse, sheltered by his money after the spotlight faded; the husband and father who put his public past away, and who refuses to talk about it to this day. Every piece of information seems only to deepen the cloud of vagueness around him, not to pierce it. Mysteries are only mysteries if you want them to be; Adam Diment certainly acts like he wants his life to remain one.

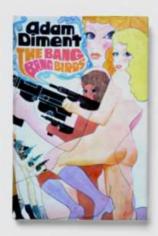
A few hours after my visit, Diment's younger son contacts me. His father isn't even in the country. In recent years, he's taken to travelling again, returning more often to the Far Eastern drop-out trail he first followed in the Seventies. It seems a poor finale to his story; not a bang (bang), not even a whimper. What would Philip McAlpine have done? More than likely, he'd have taken the hint: Diment's hero was never slow to cut his losses. But perhaps more to the point, how would the tirelessly vindictive Rupert Quine have responded?

On impulse, I look up the number of the Phnom Penh hotel where Hugh Harrison met Diment. It takes minutes of painful repetition over a crackling line to establish that a British tourist with a name somewhere in the "Mr Diment" ballpark is currently staying there, but only seconds for the cheery receptionist to offer to fetch him. I put the phone down, half-shocked, heart pounding. Has Adam Diment been a simple call away the entire time?

Ten minutes later I ring back, only to be met with incomprehension once more. But after bellowing "Die-Ment" down the line several times, something clicks; they remember me, and the errand. "Oh, yeee-sss! Die-ment! He gone."

### Adam Diment's complete bibliography...









#### The Dolly, Dolly Spy (1967)

McAlpine is blackmailed into becoming a spy when police discover his cannabis stash

#### The Bang Bang Birds (1968)

The spy pretends to be a playboy to gain access to exclusive international clubs

#### The Great Spy Race (1968)

McAlpine is tricked into heading to a tropical hideout to enter the spy Olympics

#### Think Inc (1971)

Our hero is forced to go on the run to Rome after an assignment goes wrong





Photographsby

Chris Leah

Get the flock off my land!: the author photographed in September on the grounds of his new second home, a barn conversion near Stow-on-the-Wold

ALL MY LIFE I HAVE SWORN SOLEMN allegiance to the city of my birth. And not just to the city but to my own personal quarter of it. For the last 30 years, in pubs from Archway to Chalk Farm, by way of Hampstead and Kentish Town, I have shushed the chatter of the saloon bar with a finger to my lips, raised my (ninth) pint of Pride to the ceiling and slurred, "North London: Born. Live. Die." Then fallen off my chair.

Because that is what I am: a Londoner. Sure, I'm an educated and relatively wealthy one. I'm not some cockney wife-beater in a dented van full of snide office furniture, with a season ticket to West Ham and the River Thames tattooed (back-to-front) across my chest, but I have lived in London all my life and it is where I belong. For all my private education and middle class airs and graces, I am the descendant and modern manifestation of a long line of grubby urban Jews, flung from ghetto to ghetto across Europe and finally, in the last years of the 19th century, into the East End of this great capital, where I have remained ever since, give or take a mile or two. Because this is where I feel safe, welcome and relevant.

But I harbour a secret regret. A tragic, self-deluding dream of bucolia. Of the forest of Arden, the English greenwood, dry stone walls and rolling fields where sad shire horses drag an iron plough, whole villages turn out to thresh and stack the hay at harvest time, Rosie drinks cider from a stone jug and parts her lips mysteriously... Oh God, I wish I came from the countryside.

It is all very well going to the countryside. Any fool can do that. Drive out there, look at it, have a shit pie in a moody pub, go for a boring walk along a B-road getting static off the pylons and then drive home again. It is coming from it that is so classy, and so unachievable for me. Owning a piece of it. A big piece. And having always owned it. A thousand acres of land around a 500-year-old house, where Mary Queen of Scots is rumoured to have taken a shit while on the run from Queen Elizabeth's dogs. With staff and a walled garden and a bluebell wood and ancient topiary and a yew tree in the graveyard of your family chapel with runes carved in its trunk that date from before the Conquest.

For all my having done OK in town, having a house and a car and a job and a bit of telly exposure and not being a virgin anymore, I labour under the deepest, deepest shame that I am not the 14th Earl of Somewhereshire.

I didn't always feel this way. It first came upon me in my late twenties when it turned out that everyone I know shoots, apart from me. And I mean everyone. They kept it quiet for a while, embarrassed because they were young and the world was still against that sort of thing. But gradually they started whispering about it, then talking about it more loudly, then shouting about all the fucking partridges and grouse and widgeons and ostriches or whatever-the-fuck they had blown to crap that weekend at each other's places in Shropshire. And suddenly, that's where people always were at weekends. Shooting real live animals dead. And riding horses. And fishing. And knowing the names of trees and birds and butterflies and which fly to tie when the trout are rising just so in the half-light.

The cunts. Why can't I have that? Because I come from the ghetto is why. Whereas 90 per cent of you lot don't. You come from here. And if you come from here then at some point you came from there. You weren't necessarily posh. Your people might have been emaciated tenant farmers, traditionally raped on the eve of their marriage (lucky boys) by the evil squire and doomed to die of rickets in their thirties. But at least there is a green place somewhere that you can claim. And you can feel deep down a right of eventual return.

Not me. I'm an urban grunt from some Middle Eastern cesspit by way of Hungary, Russia, Poland and the gas. No wonder you don't invite me to your houses for the weekend to eat kedgeree for breakfast and sleep by the fire under a giant dog and have a go on your gun. You know I'd shoot your fucking face off.

So, when I decided it was time to stop feeling sorry for myself and buy a place of my own, and start something now, for my descendants to be wankerish about in 1,000 years, I had to pick an area at random. The North is easy to get to from my place because I'm five minutes from the start of the A1. But the North is a fucking pisshole. Sussex is nice but you have to go either round the M25 or through Croydon to get there. And it's full of City commuters. We country types abhor commuters.

I decided on the Cotswolds. I was at university in Oxfordshire, so I know the way, and as long as the North Circular is clear I can do the journey in 90 minutes, wearing a stocking mask and carrying my wife's driving licence. Best of all, AA Gill famously hates the Cotswolds. So I knew Uncle Dysfunctional wouldn't be coming round to tap up my daughter on her wedding night. We started buying Country Life for the property section, but all the places I liked the look of were ten million quid, and the "girls in pearls" were very rarely worth a wank, so we scratched that and hired a property finder called Frank whom we met over lunch in Chelsea for an initial briefing.

On the way I told my wife that we should be prepared to consider anything, from a big Georgian rectory to a Victorian folly. Or possibly a handsome Queen Anne pile, but with no more than 16 chimneys, and only if it was in good nick. We'd want some parkland, ideally a lake...

"In the area you're looking at," Frank said genially, "and with the budget you've

It's all very well going to the country. Any fool can do that. Drive out there, look at it, have a shit pie in a moody pub, go for a boring walk along a B-road... It's coming from it that's so classy

<sup>&</sup>quot;You mean a building originally intended for chickens?" Coren takes first watch outside his new folly, by which we mean house. Ha-ha not pictured

given me, and your desire to not be anywhere near a village because 'it will probably be full of dreary old racist shits with silly accents', what you're looking at is a barn conversion."

"Sorry. What?"

"A barn conversion."

"You mean a building originally intended for chickens?"

"Well, not usually chickens."

"Usually what?"

"Usually grain, hay, straw. Sometimes cattle. Occasionally pigs."

"Well, I didn't drag myself out of the ashes of the Holocaust to go and live in a cunting pig sty," I said. "I want something beautiful. I want history. I want character. I want mullioned windows, stone floors, oak panels. I want a priest hole. I want a bloody ha-ha. I don't want a fucking cattle shed."

"You might get lucky," said Frank. "Other things do come up. I'll keep you posted."

THAT WAS BACK IN MAY LAST YEAR and as the country house market wound up to full steam over the summer, Frank took us to see quite a few pretty, old houses with well-kept lawns and mature herbaceous borders, just like I wanted. But they always had some small downside or another. Like the noise of the eight-lane motorway that separated the house from the garden, or the vibrations from the express line into Paddington going through the kitchen. Or the smell of the sewage treatment facility next door. Or being in the middle of Milton Keynes.

And then he told us to meet him at a recently converted ox barn in the middle of the middle of nowhere. It took an hour to find from Stow-on-the-Wold despite being no more than six or seven miles away (Stow-on-the-fucking-Wold! Turns out it's an actual place!) and sat at the end of a long, tree-lined drive through its own six acres of paddocks and stables. It was on top of a hill, protected on two

sides by mixed woodland, and from the front opened out onto a view that seemed to stretch forever across a vast patchwork of fields down into a wooded valley, then up the other side and on forever until it hit the pale blue, cloudless sky.

The only drawback was the house itself. "It's a fucking Barratt home!" I said.

"It is indeed a recent conversion," said Frank. "It's two late 18th-century cattle barns, one of which was taken down and replaced brick by brick, joined with modern additions and completed in 2002."

"2002," I repeated. "Wow. From those walls, 670 weeks of history gaze down upon us. It's awe-inspiring."

"But at least the heating will work," said my wife. "And the windows will close and there will be hot water and level floors and proper plumbing and the roof won't leak and..."

"But I don't want those things," I said.
"It's all very well for you, you're Welsh.
Your mother grew up on a hill farm with





### "If people come here and it's all warm and comfy and modern and convenient then they'll... they'll... they'll KNOW!" "Know what?" "That he's a Jew," said my wife. And she was dead right

a dirt floor and sheep for in-laws. Your family has had wonky windows and leaky roofs and draughty corridors and water from a well and kettles boiled on an open fire and all that marvellous old shit. But the Corens have never had that. The Corens had mansion flats. If people come here and it's all warm and comfy and modern and convenient then they'll... they'll... they'll KNOW!"

"Know what?" said Frank.
"That he's a Jew," said my wife.
And she was dead right.

BUT WE BOUGHT IT JUST THE SAME. Borrowed money off parents, sold jewellery and comic collections, told terrible lies on dozens of forms ("More than a million a year, easily, like most journalists"), mortgaged ourselves to the absolute arsehole, and just scraped over the line by swearing never to buy food or clothes again.

We exchanged at the end of August (with the ominous completion date of Halloween, 2014) and now that the deal was done we thought we might as well go back and have a look at our new home. We set off bright and early, reckoning to be there by 10am, have a squiz around and be back to get Kitty from nursery by lunchtime.

Four-and-a-half hours later we arrived. Roadworks on the Oxford ring-road. We walked silently through the huge wheat fields surrounding the house. I hadn't noticed there was so much big arable. We peered into the nettle-filled, whistling woods. We walked up onto our paddocks to have a look at the stables and pace the perimeter of our land.

"Well, this is all right, at least," I said.
"Six acres to do as we please with. Soon as we've saved some cash or one of our

"If I see a horse anywhere around here I will literally vomit." The truth is the author has taken on a gardener (another one) to do this kind of thing. But it looks good in the photos. no?

remaining parents has had the decency to clock out, we can do a tennis court and swimming pool. And there's water and 'leccy to the stables so we can turn them into a pool house and bar. Make it a proper pleasure dome."

Esther pulled the freehold contract out of her handbag and riffled though it.

"Nope," she said.

"What do you mean, 'nope'?"

"It's not domestic curtilage. It's registered as paddocks and stabling. Can't build on it, can't grow crops on it."

"Well, what the fuck can we do on it?"

"We can keep horses on it."

"What the fuck do we want horses for?"

"I don't know, darling. You're the one who wants to be a country gentleman. I suppose we'd have to ride them."

"Where?"

"Up and down?"

"That's insane! Jews don't ride horses. Cossacks ride horses. Mainly for herding Jews. If I see a horse anywhere round here I will literally vomit."

"Then don't look over there," she said, pointing to where six people wearing green quilted gilets and mounted on giant brown mammals were clomping past our kitchen window.

"What the fuck is that?" I said.

"That's a public bridleway," said my wife. "It's marked quite clearly on the map."

The front rider raised his stupid velvet crash helmet in our direction and said, "Morning!"

I gave him my best Halloween pumpkin smile, and turned my back.

We walked round to the small back garden, which we hadn't bothered to look at when we looked around before, to see if there was any room to put a swimming pool there. Luckily, there was. As long as people didn't mind using it one at a time.

We bumped into the gardener. We'll need to keep the gardener, of course. That'll be expensive. I know, because we have a gardener in London. It never

occurred to me before that I'd end up with two of the perishers.

"Bit bleak today," I said to him, turning my collar up against the driving wind and unseasonal sleet.

"Oh, I wouldn't say so," he said cheerily. "We consider this is a good day round here. Remember we're pretty high-up. And we're facing due north which is where this wind is ripping in from. You'll notice in spring, when there aren't any flowers till June, that we're a few weeks behind London with the seasons."

"What about the shelter from the woods?" I said.

"Well, I suppose on warmer days they shelter you from the sun, if there is any, because they block out the southwest. But your weather here comes straight from the North Pole with nothing in between. Lovely and brisk."

Already late for Kitty, we climbed back in the car and headed home.

"I suppose for a shade under two million you expect to have your tits and bollocks frozen off 11 months of the year," I said.

"I suppose," said my wife.

We drove on for a while in silence. I say, "drove". What we did was sit on the A40 outside Witney for three hours on account of the digging up of the Wolvercote roundabout that will add two hours to the London-Cotswolds run until late 2017, meaning that we will spend more time driving to our house at weekends than sleeping in it.

Black sleet lashed the windows.

"Quite spooky, those wheat fields," I said to my wife eventually.

"Not half as fucking spooky as that wood," she replied.

Next month: Giles and his wife move in and realise they have no furniture (where the fuck do you buy a bed at 11pm on Christmas Eve?) Four-year-old Kitty is abducted by gypsies in the woods, while two-year-old Sam drowns in a bog.

## "It's as though brain damage were popular"

American football has never been more dangerous, or more successful. Sanjiv Bhattacharya butts heads with a sport in crisis. And, weirdly, not...

Photograph by Andy Barter



It's AN ORDINARY TUESDAY NIGHT in March, on the floodlit training ground of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, in Florida, and Schenique Harris, a 43-year-old mother of eight, is quick-stepping on the balls of her feet, elbows at her side.

"Hud! Hud!"

The coach blasts on the whistle, and she sprints headlong into a bright orange tackling dummy.

"Whoo!" A big cheer goes up.

"You go girl!"

And then the next mum lines up to try. There are 100 here today, giggling through the drills. This isn't a mum's league, or some alternative to Zumba. This is a matter of life and death. Harris's son Leonard plays for the Buccaneers, and like all the mums, she wants to know if he's going to be OK. They've all heard the horror stories of players who have contracted CTE — chronic traumatic encephalopathy - a deadly form of brain damage akin to Parkinson's or Alzheimer's. So the NFL has been running a series of "mums' clinics" since 2013 in which coaches and ex-players persuade mothers, of high school kids mostly, that it's safe to let little Johnny, or big Leonard, play.

"We show them that tackling has changed," says Scott Hallenbeck, the director of USA Football, a national body formed in 2002 to train and certify coaches. "Before, coaches would teach kids to 'bite the ball' — put your face right on the ball. 'Screws to numbers' is another one — you put the screws on your face mask on the numbers on their chest. But now, we teach heads-up football. It's all about 'sky the eye'. You strike upwards with the shoulder, not the head."

The "Heads Up Football" campaign, mums' clinics and USA Football itself are all responses to a crisis. The future of America's favourite sport is at stake. Since 2008, there has been a 29 per cent drop in children aged six to 12 playing tackle football. A Bloomberg poll found that half of Americans did not want their sons playing the game. And pros are leaving the sport earlier and earlier. In the space of a few weeks in March this year, Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker Jason Worilds walked away at 27, Jake Locker of the Tennessee Titans quit at 26, and then the San Francisco 49ers linebacker Chris Borland became the youngest ever player to retire, at 24. He said, "I'm concerned that if you wait till you have symptoms, it's too late".

The symptoms of CTE are well known at this point, given the litany of high profile tragedies. Typically players report memory loss, depression and disorientation. They become unpredictable. Their lives fall apart. They turn to drugs and drink, and

some commit suicide. Pittsburgh Steeler Terry Long, 45, drank antifreeze. Fellow Steeler Justin Strzelczyk, 36, was killed in a car crash after a 40-mile police chase in New York. Jovan Belcher, 25, of the Kansas City Chiefs shot his girlfriend dead before killing himself. And so far, two players have shot themselves in the heart specifically to preserve their brains for research — Dave Duerson, 50, of the Phoenix Cardinals, and former San Diego Charger, Junior Seau, 43, who had left the league only two years previously.

We know that these men suffered CTE. When a football player dies in this way, scientists rush to the scene, saw open his skull and "harvest" his brain, shipping it to Boston University, where the neuropathologist Dr Ann McKee puts it under a microscope. So far, of the 91 ex-NFL brains she has examined since 2008, 87 show CTE — a 96 per cent correlation. Cristiano Ronaldo's less likely to score from the penalty spot. To be fair, McKee may have only selected brains that show symptoms, but still, the statistics are alarming.

Is this the end of American football? That spectre has been raised by the likes of writer Malcolm Gladwell, no less; the concussion crisis as an "existential threat". And yet, the sport has never been bigger. In 2015, the NFL put on the biggest Superbowl ever — the largest audience in American TV history (120.8m). A month into the 2014 season, the top seven rated TV shows of that week were all NFL (another first). Two of America's top three sports are football: the NFL at number one, then baseball and college football (with basketball at fourth). Fantasy football has a record 33m players. And, like Billy idol's "Rebel Yell", the NFL wants more, more, more. In 2010, the commissioner Roger Goodell announced he wanted to grow a \$10bn business to \$25bn by 2027. (By comparison, the Premier League broke \$5bn in revenues in 2013-'14.) It is developing markets in Mexico, Brazil and China, and in October, the League's expansion reached England again, when the Miami Dolphins and the New York Jets, among others, played at Wembley.

This is the fascinating paradox of football. Even as the bodies stack up, along with evidence of CTE, the sport just keeps growing. It's as though brain damage itself were popular. So football is dying and thriving at once. It is a tower whose foundations are crumbling and yet they keep adding more floors. This is a story about cognitive dissonance.

For instance, in January, a study in the *Journal of Neurology* showed that retired NFL players who started playing before the age of 12 showed greater impairment

than those who started later. One of the authors, Robert Cantu, Professor of Neurosurgery at Boston University, stressed that children are especially vulnerable to head trauma: "Young brains are housed in disproportionately big heads, which are on very weak necks, so you get the bobblehead doll effect. To allow your child to be subjected to repetitive head injuries at an early age is, to me, just insane."

The report was like a tackle — first the hit, then the takedown — because if the supply of young players dwindles, the NFL loses twice over. Not just future athletes but future fans; people care less about a sport they have never played. And yet four days after the study came out, the NFL put on the biggest Superbowl ever.

How can this be?

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THE BEST BOOK ON FOOTBALL'S CTE crisis has the answer in the title: League of

Denial, by the ESPN reporters Mark Fainaru-Wada and his brother Steve. From the moment CTE was diagnosed in 2002, the NFL fought it. Before then, boxers called it "punch drunk", or dementia pugilistica. But then "Iron" Mike Webster, a former Hall of Fame Pittsburgh Steeler, died at 50, 11 years after retirement. A beloved player, his life had spiralled horribly. Angry and paranoid, he was in constant pain, and his nerves were so shot he couldn't sleep unless his son tasered him. His marriage collapsed. He wound up living in a pick-up truck. And he blamed football for it all. He even accumulated an arsenal of weapons and talked about killing NFL officials.

The official cause of death was a heart attack, but the forensic pathologist at the autopsy, a young Nigerian named Bennett

"It's one thing for a retired athlete to have aches and pains when he bends over to pick up his child. It's another thing not to recognize that child" Omalu, refused to leave it there. He'd read that Webster had shown post-concussion syndrome and suffered depression, so Omalu examined his brain. A devout Catholic, he believes in life after death and, as he told *Frontline* (US equivalent of *Panorama*), he speaks to the bodies on his table: "I said to him: 'Mike, you need to help me. Let's prove them wrong. You are a victim of football, but you need to help me wherever you are."

What he discovered may change sports forever — not just football, but hockey, rugby, and even soccer where brain trauma due to heading is not uncommon. The story of Omalu and Webster, and the NFL's response, is the subject of a Will Smith movie, *Concussion*, out this Christmas, .

"There's a protein called tau in every healthy neuron," says Robert Stern, Professor of Neurology at Boston University. (The world's leading CTE scientists are at Boston University, such as McKee, Cantu and Stern. Omalu is no longer involved.) "Think of it as the railroad of the nerve cell, it carries information from one part of the neuron to another... But after brain impact, the tau becomes tangled, the railroad tracks are destroyed and eventually the nerve cell dies. Webster's brain showed a lot of tangled tau."

It was just one case, one scientific paper, and in its aftermath nothing much happened. But then a young ex-wrestler, Chris Nowinski, began scouring the literature on concussions. A Harvard graduate (wrestling name "Chris Harvard"), he had suffered post-concussion syndrome himself, and wanted to understand it. But there wasn't much out there, besides Omalu's findings. So, Nowinski decided to pitch in. Though not a scientist himself, he would help in sourcing brains for Omalu and other researchers. Whenever a football player died, he would call the grieving family and ask for the brain, a story he tells in his book Head Games.

Brain by brain the damning science emerged, showing that CTE wasn't only caused by concussion but also by lower level "sub-concussive" injuries. And instantly, the NFL went on the attack. Their methods echoed the way Big Tobacco fought the facts about cancer, or the way the fossil fuel industry fights the facts about global warming. When facts threaten a profitable institution, there's a playbook - hire your own scientists, sow doubt, attack reputations and insist on more research. As Naomi Oreskes writes in Merchants of Doubt: "The whole doubt-mongering strategy relies on creating the impression of scientific debate." And for the NFL, that impression would be generated by its own hastily convened body, the comically named, "Mild Traumatic



In a 2012 murder-suicide meltdown, Kansas City Chiefs' linebacker Jovan Belcher shot dead his girlfriend Kasandra Perkins, orphaning their three-month-old baby Zoey. Post-mortem tests on the star player's brain revealed evidence of damage consistent with CTE, chronic traumatic encephalopathy, caused by blows to the head

Brain Injury Committee" (MTBIC).

Between 2003 and 2009, MTBIC scientists published papers denying that any NFL player had experienced chronic brain damage as a result of concussions. They argued that football weeded out the weak - if you made it to the pros, you were less susceptible to concussion. And, according to one December 2005 paper published in science journal Neurosurgery, "Professional football players do not sustain frequent repetitive blows to the brain". Never mind that the opening sequence for Monday Night Football, America's leading NFL show, shows two helmets smashing into each other. Nor that the NFL's retirement board had written that Mike Webster had been left permanently disabled by "head injuries he suffered as a football player".

Then-commissioner Paul Tagliabue — essentially the head of the NFL — dismissed media reports as "pack journalism". And MTBIC scientists such as Ira Casson and Elliot Pellman accused Omalu of fraud, demanding he retract his findings. Omalu told *Frontline* that he was even accused of attacking the American way of life: "Some of them said, 'What is Nigeria known for, the eighth most corrupt country in the world? Who are you to tell us how to live our lives?"

Few comparisons are less flattering than Big Tobacco, and yet the pattern of denial and obfuscation is so similar. Just as the tobacco companies denied knowledge for decades, the League still hasn't admitted a causal link between football and CTE, as an admission would open the floodgates to litigation. But the NFL can't survive as the



Terry Long played right guard for the Pittsburgh Steelers from 1984 to 1991. In 2005, aged 45, he died after drinking antifreeze. The coroner's verdict was suicide but a brain examination found evidence of CTE damage that likely caused severe depression

Big Tobacco of sport because it needs to be loved, not loathed. So, for the sake of PR, Goodell has changed tack, from playing offence to damage control. The MTBIC has been disbanded, its scientists laid off, and the League's gestural donations to CTE research now go to unbiased, federally funded bodies like the National Institute of Health. But still, it avoids the subject wherever possible; CTE remains the brain-damaged elephant in the room. In his increasingly rare interviews, Goodell slips tackles by saying that he would sooner leave the science to the scientists. But he can't equivocate forever.

"This issue is a ticking clock," says Leigh Steinberg, the agent on whom Jerry Maguire was based, now a leading voice on CTE. "This affects memory, consciousness, what it means to be a human being. It's one thing for a retired athlete have aches and pains when he bends over to pick up his child. It's another thing to not recognize that child."

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No sport is quite so American as football. The cheerleaders, the spectacle, the stopping for commercials. It never caught on elsewhere; a rare symbol of American cultural isolation. But in the US, it eclipses all others. More high-school boys play football than the second and third sports combined. It's the sport of *Friday Night Lights*, of small town religion, the local gridiron, a field of dreams and heroes.

"You know why it's central to our identity?" says Buzz Bissinger, writer of *Friday Night Lights*. "Because it's violent. America was built on violence. We have the myth of the gunslinger, the rugged individual. Anyone who says, 'I love it because it's beautiful' is full of shit. This is the Romans and the lions. It's a gladiatorial spectacle."

It was conceived during a brief lull in American violence, in the late 1860s and early 1870s, a shortfall that football would fill. The older generation had fought the Civil War and then gone west to subdue the Indians. But that left their sons with no wars to fight or lands to conquer, so how could they prove their toughness? According to Michael Oriard, an ex-player

turned historian and author of the book *Brand NFL*, the elites of Harvard and Yale devised football as "a testing ground, a way to regenerate an effete upper class". America's favourite sport was born of a crisis of masculinity.

At first, it was nothing but violence, a crude mimicry of military conflict. Teams lined up like armies and concentrated their force to breach defences and advance into enemy territory, maiming the opposition if possible. There was no throwing the ball back then, no glimmer of grace. It was just collision and hurt, as close to Orwell's "war minus the shooting" as there had ever been. And men died routinely. In 1905, so many died (19) that President Teddy Roosevelt insisted that the rules be rewritten. Only then, inspired by the Wright brothers, did the ball take flight and the ground war was complemented by aerial assault, the glorious arc of the ball sailing over the carnage below.

For writer Chuck Klosterman, the ball's flight exemplifies football's tendency to innovate, which in turn explains its enduring appeal. "Soccer and baseball institutions want the sport to stay the same for all time," he told the podcast Radiolab earlier this year. "But football's constantly evolving and adopting new ideas and new technologies." In 1994, for instance, coaches started talking to quarterbacks through a radio in the helmet. New offences and plays keep revolutionising the way the game is played. In order to keep things competitive, the NFL instituted a socialistic revenuesharing model to help smaller teams. The draft is a similar innovation that allows weaker teams first pick of the best players.

In other words, Klosterman argues, the way the NFL operates is highly progressive and open to new ideas, while "the morality of the game, its biggest draw, is that the strongest and toughest win. So, football is built for the American way of thinking," he says. "It allows you to think about the game in a progressive, liberal way, but spiritually, the heart of it can be this old conservative mindset. And that's what most people want. They want to think of themselves as progressive, but they feel conservative."

It says something about football's current plight that last year, in *The New York Times*, Klosterman felt the need to defend the ethics of enjoying football at all, a sport that attorney Michael Kaplan, representing brain trauma victims, described as "a concussion delivery system". The players aren't coerced, Klosterman argued, they're aware of the risk. So all football's popularity means is that "we love something that's dangerous. And I'm OK with that."

Bissinger goes further: the danger is the point. "The thrill of the hit is incredible," he

says. "Your heart beats faster, it can change the tenor of a game. Because this is also a game of intimidation. If you knock the shit out of someone, they're not going to go after you anymore."

But concussion isn't the only ethical issue that dogs modern football. There's a whole string of them. The recent rash of domestic violence scandals, for example, notably the running back Ray Rice who knocked his fiancée out cold in an elevator, caught on video; the League came under fire for only suspending him for two games. Then there's the NFL's business model in which teams (actually "franchises") routinely hold host cities over a barrel by threatening to move, charge local taxpayers and pay no tax themselves on the grounds that the League is a charity (paying Goodell \$44m per year).

Meanwhile, college football, the NFL's supply pool, generates billions but pays its athletes nothing as it considers them "amateurs", a system frequently likened to slavery. The author Taylor Branch, the most eminent historian of the civil rights movement, writes of "the whiff of the plantation". Bissinger compares all college sports to slavery. And in his withering polemic, Against Football, Steve Almond, writes: "two-thirds of players are black and the NFL fuels the most insidious and intractable stereotypes about such men. That they're inherently animalistic." Players are bought and sold by exclusively white owners, and described by television commentators as "studs" and "beasts". It's no coincidence that football's heartland is the South, the former Confederacy.

In some ways, football is a period piece, like Mad Men, with values belonging to a past whose prejudices we see clearly now. For all its innovation when it comes to rules, the sport remains a bastion of retrograde masculinity. Women are eye candy. Men in tight pants clinch and huddle, but revolt when a player actually comes out, as Michael Sam did last year, a brilliant college player who was drafted, then discarded by the NFL, and now plays his football in Canada. The old machismo doesn't fly in our feminised culture. Men are more sensitive now, more empathetic. Gender is less easily defined. And brawn is a wilting measure of a man. Pencil-necked geeks have inherited the Earth. The cultural terroir of the sport has changed. This is another reason — besides CTE — why the league campaigns to keep boys in the sport. Just as football grew out of one assertion of masculinity, 150 years later it is being undone by another. Nineteenth century men wanted to show their elders how tough they were, but the current generation is sending a different message that it rejects a world of aggression, where physicality reigns. For Leigh Steinberg, this even extends to America's role in the world. "For football to fade is like reducing the emphasis on physical force, on a military approach," he says. "It's like a foreign policy of isolationism instead of engagement."

My own suspicion is that football's predicament reflects America's morphing sense of self. Since CTE was diagnosed in 2002, the US has weathered a series of blows - wars have been lost, the economy has collapsed. What happens when a superpower is revealed to be less than super, or its power is found wanting? In politics, the right wants to return to a more glorious time, to restore American greatness; witness the rise of Donald Trump. And in popular culture, superhero movies have exploded: a counterweight to this sense of vulnerability. What the superpower can't do, the superheroes can. Americans are turning to fantasies for consolation. And football has always allowed them to dream; those bulked-up giants with shoulder pads and helmets already look like something out of Marvel or DC comics.

This is where the dissonance lives: even though football harkens to a past that it's time to move away from, it's still a comfort during times of change. Though America's role in the world has diminished, and the American Dream feels more remote than ever, fans are restored by their teams.

"Football is an expression of national confidence," Steinberg says. "And our confidence has been knocked. We don't feel we're winning economically, China and India are ascendant. And internally, American exceptionalism has been challenged in a way that hasn't happened since the Sixties."

With futures uncertain, jobs insecure, and now the national sport also in trouble, where can fans turn? Prince said it best, in "If I was Your Girlfriend": "Would you run 2 me if somebody hurt u, even if that somebody was me?"

"When the Rice scandal broke, there was a lot of antipathy and anger toward the NFL," Steinberg says. "But how did people express that? They went out the next Sunday and watched games in record numbers. Football was their escape."

+++

Ask the NFL about CTE and emails go unanswered, calls unreturned. Eventually, a committee of publicists set up some phone interviews, most of them monitored. But what's clear is that the League no longer denies the science, or attacks scientists.

Instead, it stresses its durability, its willingness to adapt.

Look at the incremental changes, they say, the Heads Up Football scheme and the new rules which penalise "crown of the helmet" hits. Look at the emerging technologies, what Scott Hallenbeck of USA Football calls "an arms race in terms of creating new equipment". A helmet is in development with sensors to communicate impact data to a central computer, and there's a sensor device that goes behind the ear and can measure linear and rotational forces.

Fans aren't always thrilled with these changes, or the way TV commentators now temper their delight at crushing tackles. "This is a mano-a-mano sport," Bissinger says. "You're in the trenches, it's pure competition. You can't edit the collision out of football, OK?"

But even so, Bissinger is consoled that football will prevail. These new rules are just a minor dilution, not the thin end of a wedge. "The NFL is too big to fail," he says.

"You know why football's central to America's identity? Because it's violent.
America was built on violence"

"And not just because it can pay people off, but because these small American towns, they got nothing else to look forward to on a Friday night." Or as comedian Bill Burr said, "the NFL commissioner could literally punt a baby across his office with his wingtips on. I'm still going to watch on Sunday. It's all I have."

According to Mark Waller, the NFL's Executive VP of International, American football plays an even more indispensable role in society than soccer does in the UK. "English soccer has an intense rivalry component. It can be divisive in some ways," he says. "But in the US, sports is a community celebration. It brings people together. And football's the pinnacle of that."

Besides, it's enormously profitable. Sport remains one of the last ways networks can attract viewers to live television, which advertisers love. (You can record the game to watch later, skipping the ads, but you'll likely already know the result, so the thrill is gone.) No self-respecting corporate giant is going to forgo record profits simply because its players are getting brain damage, especially if those players accept the risks. Michael Oriard describes this as "the nightmare scenario", football's degeneration into boxing, a fringe sport for the poor. "It's Rome," he says. "Rich folks watching poor kids destroy their brains for our pleasure." But, as he admits, it's already happening. "Rich parents are shifting their kids into hockey or lacrosse, sports poor kids don't have access to." And still, football seems just fine.

The science of CTE isn't definitive enough yet to hobble the sport. Since CTE can only be detected in the dead, the number of data samples is necessarily small and the pace of research is limited. It's still not







Above: Seen here taking a violent tackle, Dave Duerson (in blue shirt), is the former Chicago Bears defensive back who committed suicide by shooting himself in the chest to preserve his brain for study.

Below left: From 1990–2005, linebacker Junior Seau played for San Diego Chargers, Miami Dolphins and New England Patriots; he, too, shot himself in the chest

clear why some players show CTE after head trauma, and others don't. "There may be lots of factors," says Richard Ellenbogen, a University of Washington neurosurgeon who sits on an NFL committee pro bono. "A 50-year-old football player has had billions of experiences. To say that head trauma is the major culprit is oversimplifying. And why head trauma from football especially? Life is a concussion sport." His skepticism is supported by an article in Neurology magazine from May. Every doctor I spoke to posited that genetics may make some players more susceptible to CTE than others. In the end, it boils down to the old Big Tobacco mantra, "more research is necessary".

"We were all convinced that peptic ulcers were caused by acid, so we treated it accordingly," says Ellenbogen. "But then, after 150 years, we discovered they're actually caused by bacteria. So we need to be careful.

Equipoise is the word. Let's make football safer, of course, but weigh its benefits, too. There are health benefits to sports."

Meanwhile, at NFL headquarters, the vultures are circling, or rather the attorneys. As with Big Tobacco, lawsuits will likely do the greatest damage, even though to date, the NFL has got off lightly. In April, it settled a class action suit for \$765m, which sounds more painful than it was - many players were excluded, the payments go out over 65 years, and anyway, it's small beer for a league that makes \$1.2bn per season from a single (beer) sponsor, Anheuser Busch. But there are hundreds of potential litigants who sat out that lawsuit in the anticipation they'd do better on their own. And they well might. One reason the NFL has weathered the storm so far is because the pool of potential plaintiffs is limited; only families of dead players have a claim, and those living players who show severe impairment. It's a similar impediment to that which CTE researchers face. However, that pool may soon grow, and fast. The attorneys and the scientists are on the verge of a breakthrough.

"We're very close to detecting CTE in living athletes," says Robert Stern. "One way is a PET scan. But the one I'm most excited about is a blood test." Evidently, the tau protein is encompassed in a little bubble excreted from every cell in the body. And that bubble can cross the barrier between the brain and the blood stream. "If we can isolate those bubbles, and measure the abnormal tau, we'll be able to diagnose CTE in a blood test. It'll be routine," Stern says.

Could this be the death knell for football? If high school athletes can test for CTE after a few years of football, the number of players will plunge, while the number of litigants will explode. That blood test could be football's lethal injection. And in keeping with the dissonance that marks this whole story, this scientific breakthrough will likely be funded by the NFL. Stern expects a major grant for his blood test research, enough to put 50 scientists to work all over the country. And that grant will come from the National Institute for Health, to whom the NFL paid \$30m earlier this year, as part of the terms of its class action lawsuit.

In other words, the NFL, while marketing the sport's safety at mums' clinics, is funding the science that may prove otherwise. Something will have to give, some day. But until then, the games continue and the stadiums roar. And players and their mums keep their "eyes to the sky", hoping to keep the gathering storm at bay.



#### **Watches**

Edited by
Teo van den Broeke

Photographs by Sam Hofman





# Life time

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#### **Aviation**

Transocean Chronograph 1915, 43mm steel case, Ocean Classic steel bracelet, £6,790, by Breitling BRO3 Rafale, 42mm matte black ceramic case, black rubber strap, £4,200, by Bell & Ross



















#### Fashion

Photographs by
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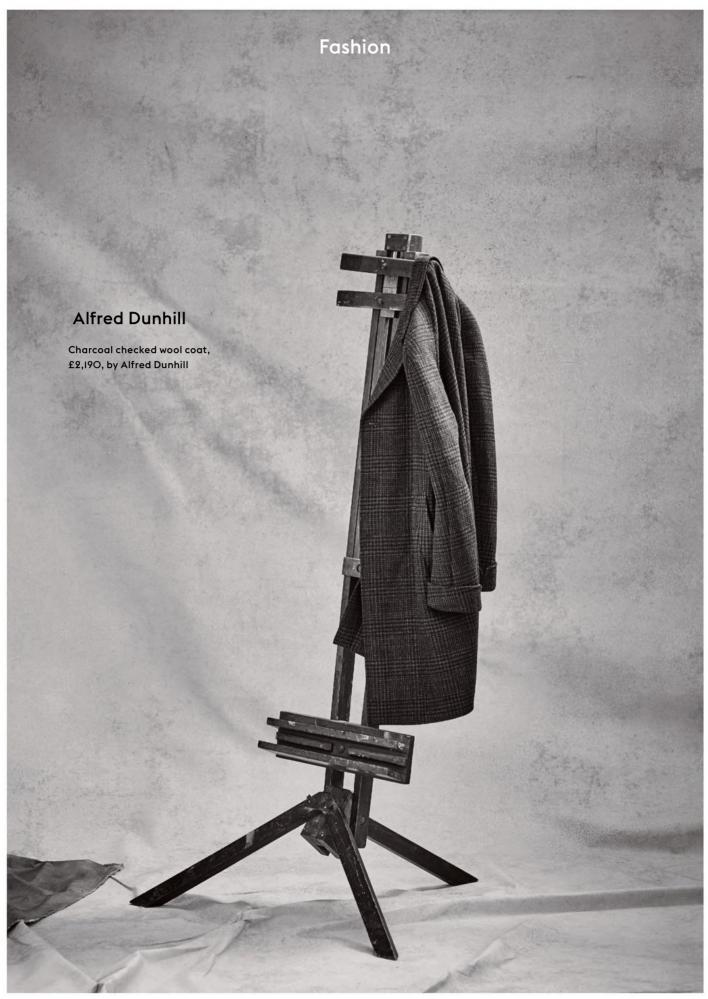
# Fresh coats

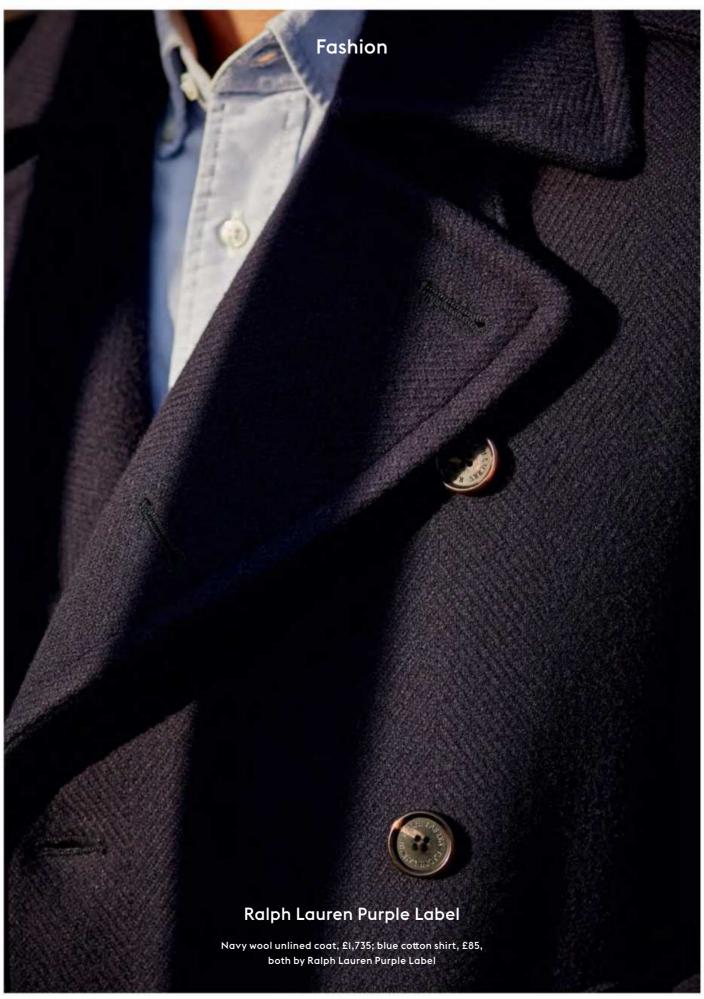
Ben Whishaw has stolen scenes in five of the biggest films of the year, including playing Q in a certain spy movie currently in cinemas. For Esquire, he takes centre stage in winter's most desirable overcoats

#### **Burberry Prorsum**

Navy wool double-breasted coat with detachable shearling collar, £2,495; navy cotton shirt, £295; blue wool-mix trousers, £325, all by Burberry Prorsum.

White leather trainers, £180, by Tim Little

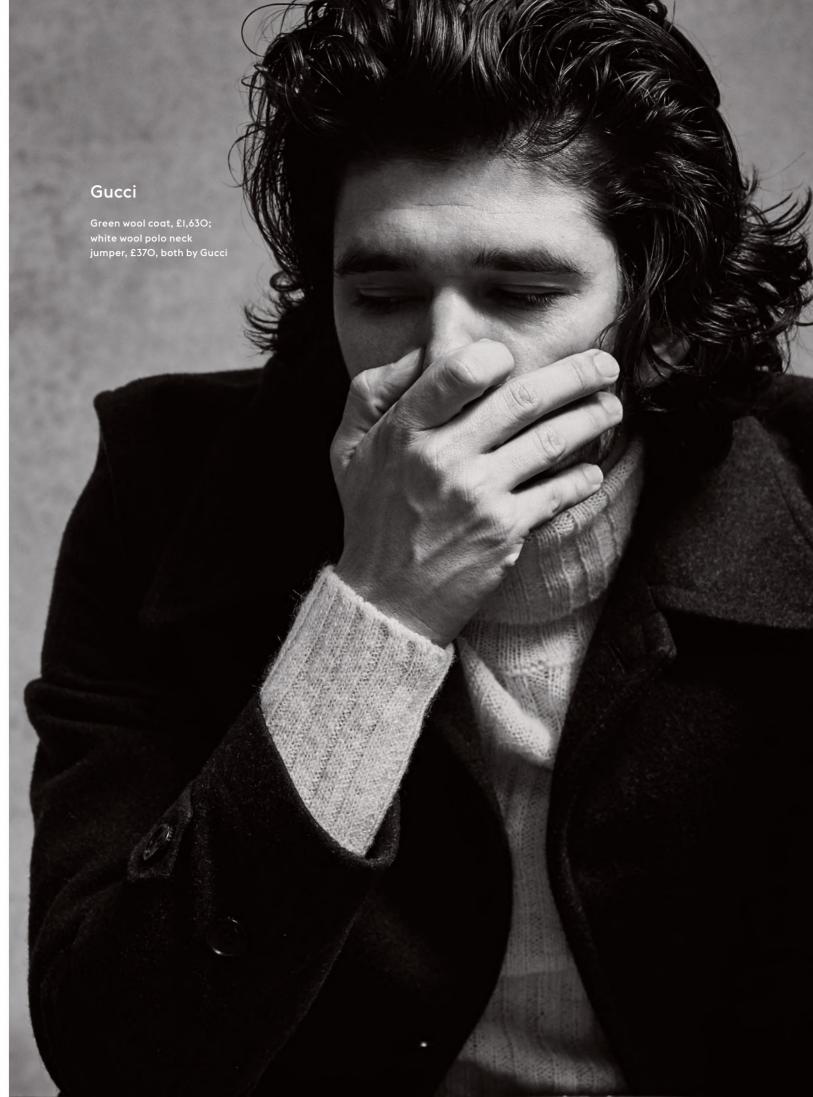




## Fashion

## Giorgio Armani

Navy wool coat, £1,695; red cashmere jumper, £715; grey wool trousers, £745, all by Giorgio Armani. Black calf leather shoes, £350, by Church's



#### **Fashion**

When it comes time for the customary year-end lists of the biggest and best films of 2015, a good starting point will be Ben Whishaw's filmography. In recent months, the Bedfordshire-born actor has appeared in — deep breath — Suffragette, Abi Morgan's all-star retelling of the women's liberation movement; In the Heart of the Sea, a blockbuster from Ron Howard about the origins of Moby Dick; Lobster, a bizarre and brilliant art house hit; The Danish Girl, a timely drama about a transgender pioneer; and finally, Spectre, the latest in a reasonably popular spy franchise and follow-up to the biggest British film of all time (he starred in that, too).



In other words, a succession of critical and commercial hits that would make all but the world's A-list consider sacking their agents in a fit of envy. So, we ask the 35-year-old over coffee in a London restaurant, quite a career-defining year for you, then?

"I guess so," Whishaw says, brushing a few strands of unruly black hair from his eyes, reclining in his chair, glancing out at rain-splattered Piccadilly. "But then I don't really have a grand 'career plan' for myself. I think if I did, it would stop feeling like an adventure. I would stop being fascinated by all these things I have found myself doing, things I never thought I'd find myself doing."

Thoughtful, polite and unaffected — he's one of those actors who finds his modest level of fame a bemusing by-product of his job, rather than the point of it — Whishaw would probably be the last to elaborate on these experiences, so allow us.

He has kissed his Oscar-winning peer Eddie Redmayne in *The Danish Girl* ("We'd met before for a beer, which doesn't make it any less peculiar, to be honest"), read all of *Moby Dick* and perfected an American accent to play Herman Melville in *In the Heart of the Sea* ("a posh New England one, which is the easiest"), and, of course, returned as Q to swap quips with Daniel Craig in *Spectre*, an inspired bit of casting with, we point out, the unfortunate side-effect of ruling him out of ever playing 007 himself: "I don't think that was very likely anyway," he replies dryly.

Keeping with the Bond theme, next up Whishaw plays Danny, a Londoner who falls for a secret agent in new BBC miniseries London Spy. "Danny reminds me of a lot of people I know, of how easy it is when you're young and living in the capital to lose your way and feel directionless," he says.

It is in part a love story, though Whishaw promises the drama, written by *Child 44* author Tom Rob Smith, "has a lot of twists and surprises, and nothing is quite what it appears."

Despite professing to dislike clothes shopping, it is noted that during his *Esquire* shoot, Whishaw took a particular shine to a pair of double-pleated Giorgio Armani trousers. How does he approach style in general?

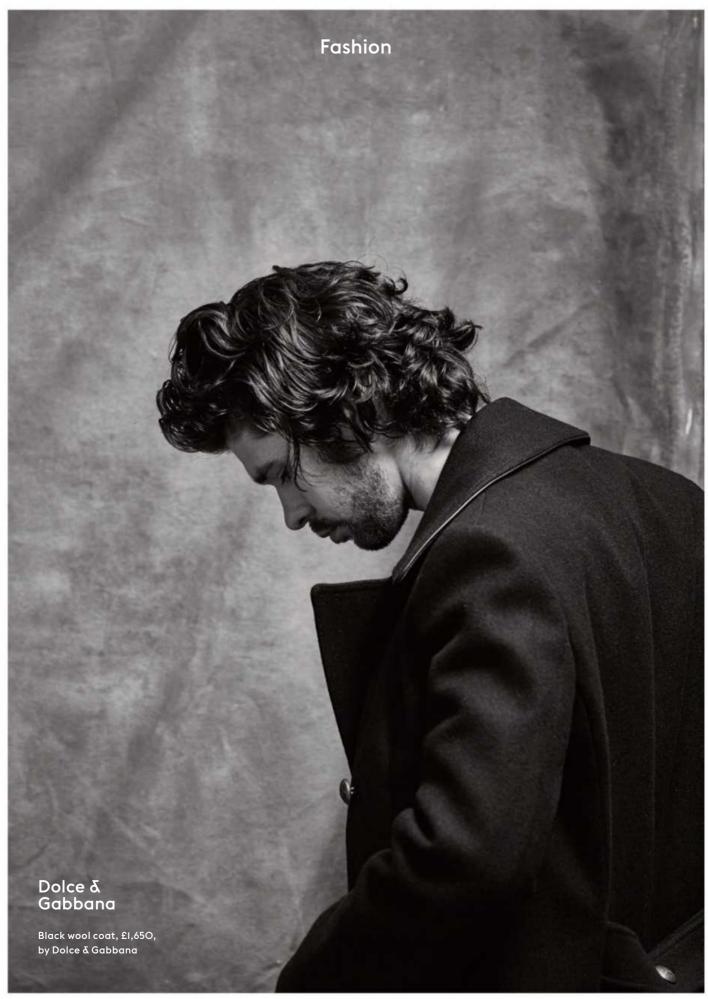
"I do like wearing a lot of black," he deadpans, nodding at today's ensemble of skinny black jeans and a casual, you might even say faintly natty, black shirt. "I am quite fussy about colour, so I stick to a small palette. A little red, some blue, maybe a khaki green. And I try to always have at least one leather jacket and a big trench coat. Oh, and I've developed a love for a good pair of shoes — like these," he says, lifting a leg to reveal a pair of well-polished Church's oxford lace-ups (black, of course). "I went through a long phase of just wearing Vans and having wet feet all the time. But I had to get out of that habit now I am in my mid-thirties. Some things start to be a no-go, don't they?"

In 2016, Whishaw is heading to Broadway for a 20-week run playing John Proctor, the doomed lead in Arthur Miller's witch-hunt classic, *The Crucible*.

"It's more nerve-wracking than being on set," he says of theatre. "But it's always more pleasure than pain. The best piece of advice I ever got was from [director] Jane Campion. She told me: 'Stop trying so hard'. I am still trying to live that way."

Interview by Sam Parker

London Spy starts on BBC2 on 9 November























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As you'll read in the recently published sixth issue of *Esquire*'s style manual for successful men, *The Big Black Book*, Alessandro Sartori, creative director at Berluti, is a designer obsessed with beguiling textures and shades. This pair of gloves in chocolate lambskin nappa leather delivers both, effortlessly and beautifully. They're silk-lined, so offer that extra touch of luxury (and warmth), while the fingertips are embossed with the "Scritto" motif — the brand's tribute to calligraphy inspired by an 18th-century seal and manuscript. This winter, they will be the perfect accessory to a hefty wool overcoat, knitwear and brown leather lace-up shoes (Berluti, of course, should have a pair to match).



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